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MISS MOLLY

MISS MOLLY

BY

BEATRICE MAY BUTT

"A TALE NOT NEW
NOR JOYFUL, BUT A COMMON TALE"

THIRD EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXVI

251. c. 441.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	BROOK AND RIVER,	1
II.	FAIR AND FALSE,	13
III.	TAKE CARE, TAKE CARE,	19
IV.	SMOOTH WATERS,	32
V.	STOLEN KISSES,	42
VI.	SAD THINGS ARE AYE TOO TRUE,	52
VII.	THE RIGHT PATH AND THE WRONG,	60
VIII.	A WILFUL WOMAN,	71
IX.	THE OLD, OLD STORY,	83
X.	SWEET IS TRUE LOVE,	101
XI.	LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM,	114
XII.	PRIEZ POUR ELLE,	134
XIII.	A TANGLED WEB,	148
XIV.	LOVE WILL FIND OUT THE WAY,	164
XV.	WAITING,	173
XVI.	HOPE IS DEAD,	180

XVII. HALF BROKEN-HEARTED, ... 193

XVIII. HIS HEART WAS DARKENED WITH HER SHADOW, ... 197

XIX. COMFORT HER, COMFORT HER, . . . 213

XX. VIOLETS, ... 219

XXI. FOND MEMORY'S CHAIN, ... 229

XXII. NEWS FROM THE CRIMEA, . . . 233

XXIII. HE SLEEPS WELL, ... 238

XXIV. FOR EVER TRUE, ... 249

XXV. MY HEART IS SAIR FOR SOMEBODY, . . 261

XXVI. DINNA FORGET, LOVE! DINNA FORGET! . 276

MISS MOLLY.

CHAPTER I.

BROOK AND RIVER.

"She was changing and yet true."

SHE had not been christened "Miss Molly," but the pet name she had given herself in babyhood had clung to her all the nineteen years of her life —as pet names, pretty or ugly, have a habit of doing.

And now that I have so far explained to you the origin of her name, I must introduce you to herself.

A long, low room, a fire blazing on the hearth, which cast a comfortable red glare on all around, more comfortable than ever, after one glance at the grey, wintry sky outside. These were her sur-

roundings. At the table a lady writing; a pleasant, comely woman, almost too young-looking to be the mother of the girl standing by her side.

No fairy heroine of romance was Miss Molly. Not divinely beautiful by any means, but just a fair, sweet English girl; tall and slight, with soft brown hair and eyes, and a real old-fashioned white and pink complexion, such as our grandmothers are wont to boast have never been seen since their young days. The pink was predominant now as she leant over her mother, and exclaimed in an excited voice—

"What does Mrs Kingscote say? Do let me read her note!"

"Wait a second, Molly; how impatient you are! I have scarcely had time to look at it myself. Here, Genie," she went on, "you take it, and let Molly see what is in it."

At her mother's words, the girl to whom she had spoken raised her head from her book. For an instant you might have believed it was Molly's wraith, so alike were the twins—the features, colouring, height, were so exactly the same; but to those who knew them well, day and night were not more different than gentle Genie, and wild, excitable Miss Molly.

"Let me read it first, Genie—I will give it you in a minute;" and without waiting for a word of

refusal from her sister, she opened it and began reading aloud :—

"EVERSLEIGH HALL.

"DEAR LADY ANSTRUTHER,—

"Would you let your two girls come over and stay with us for a week on the 15th, so as to be with us for our ball; it will be so much pleasanter for them than having the long, cold drive on the night itself. My son, Colonel Kingscote, will be here; also a young brother officer of his, Captain Burnaby by name,—so between us we will do our best to amuse your girls. If we could persuade you and your husband to break through your usual rule, and bring them, you know what great pleasure it would give us; if not, I hope you will trust Genie and Molly to the care of your old friend,

"RACHEL KINGSCOTE.

"*P.S.*—It has just struck me, that perhaps your eldest son may be at home on leave; if so, I should be delighted if he would bring his sisters."

"One for each of us," remarked Miss Molly, sententiously, dropping the note. "Which will you have, Genie?"

"I do not think the first choice will lie with me," said her sister, glancing proudly up at the bright, happy face above her.

"Oh, you give it up to me, do you? Then I choose the colonel. But wait a minute till I see by the 'Army List' how far up in the captains the other one is. Mother, where are my Lares and Penates, the household gods of the Romans, without which they never stirred abroad—as we used to learn in Mangnall's Questions—which, in this instance, means my 'Army List'?"

Her mother and sister were too much accustomed to her wildness to take much notice of her, till at last, having found the book, she flung herself down on the floor by Genie, and proceeded to read down the list of names.

"The —th Hussars; that is Colonel Kingscote's regiment, I know. Burnaby! Burnaby! Yes, here he is! Reginald Burnaby! The very last. So, Genie, with a sigh I resign 'the young brother officer' to you, and for myself I reserve the Colonel. But I am sorry, for Reginald Burnaby is such a very pretty name!"

"My dear Molly, what nonsense are you talking?" asked her mother, who had at last, having finished casting up a long column of figures, become aware of what was going on around her.

"I am only waiting to know if we may go."

"I don't know any reason why you should not, if your father will let you."

"I'll go immediately and ask him. And then

you must write, sweet mother, directly, for fear of he or you finding out any reason against it afterwards."

And before a word could be said, she had departed, quick as thought, to her father's study.

"How fearfully excitable she is!" exclaimed her mother, with a little sigh, as the door closed behind her. "I sometimes fear for her, poor child! It would take so much trouble to quiet her."

"Oh, mother, I would not have her changed for the world! It is nothing," replied her sister, "but high spirits and good health." And as she went on with her book, she added rather sadly, "I sometimes wish that I were more like her!"

"Don't wish that," said her mother, rising and laying a soft, caressing hand on her daughter's shoulder; "I don't know what we should do without one quiet one in the house." And as she stooped and pressed a fond kiss on Genie's forehead, Molly's gay, young voice, echoing through the house, was heard calling, "Genie! Genie!" Genie opened the door, and went out to meet her. "Well?" she questioned.

"Well, papa says he knows no reason why we should not go. But Hubert cannot take us, I am sorry to say. Did you not say so?" turning to a tall young fellow, who was trying to keep up with her rapid footsteps.

"Yes. I am awfully sorry, but it just comes too late—for I must join my regiment on the 15th. But could not you be persuaded, mother, to take them?"

"Oh no, my dear. What would your father say if he heard of my starting off to stay away anywhere for a week? It is a pity *you* cannot go; but I am sure, anyhow, the girls will enjoy it immensely — Mrs Kingscote is always charming. By-the-by,"—she added, a sudden thought seeming to strike her, "I thought you were all going out skating this morning."

"Yes, so we are," said Miss Molly. "Come and get ready, Genie, or it will be too late to be worth while starting before lunch."

Eversleigh Lake was a perfect paradise for skaters, and was esteemed as such by the whole neighbourhood. Only a very short distance from the Grange lay a broad sheet of water, nearly a mile long, with little islands at intervals down its length, where the weary or the idle could rest; and, over and above all, one other recommendation it offered—a great one to the timid—nowhere was it deep enough to be dangerous; and as a consequence of these many advantages, it was always crowded.

As the Anstruthers came within sight of it, they paused involuntarily to look at the pretty, gay

scene before them. The lake was covered with people making the best use they could of the few days the frost was allowing them. The wintry sun had at last burst through the grey mists that had been shrouding it, and was shedding its rays on the holiday-seeking throng.

"What perfect weather!" exclaimed Genie; "it makes one feel quite happy only to breathe on such a day as this."

"Just the sort of day one ought to be in love," remarked her brother.

"In love! why?" questioned Molly; "what an extraordinary idea!"

"Oh, I don't know why; only, being in love is generally supposed to be the summit of human bliss, is it not?"

"Well, take the advice of one who knows, Hubert," replied his sister, "and never wish for such a thing again. I, who have been in love seventeen or eighteen times—which is it, Genie?—can tell you, from bitter experience, that the only really happy days I ever know are the few odd ones at the close of one *affaire de cœur* and before the beginning of the next!"

"May I ask," said Hubert, "whether this is an interregnum, or whether you are now suffering from heart-disease; and if so, who is the object?"

"If you had had more experience, Hubert, you

might have seen that 'I am letting concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed upon my damask cheek.' As to the 'object,'—well, on lifting my eyes I see the 'object' steadily making its way towards us—so change the subject please, or he will see that we are talking of him."

A minute later they were joined by a good-looking, fair young man, who came up and spoke to them.

"How do you do, Miss Anstruther?"

"How do you do, Mr Winwick?"

"Holloa, Anstruther! I had no idea you were at home."

"Yes, I am here just now; but I am sorry to say my leave is up on the 15th, so I shall miss the Kingscote's hop. And you?"

"I? I am spending Christmas with my aunt. It sounds good, doesn't it? But the fact is, the only other relation I have in the world—a cousin—is at Nice, and I really could not, nay would not, go there."

"Oh, that's your history, is it? So far, I agree with you, that there are nicer places than Nice. As you are here, we will make use of you. Will you put on Molly's skates? Here, Genie, in the meantime we will go to the steps, where it will be more comfortable for you, and I will arrange yours."

As they moved away Genie said—

"It is really too bad of you, Hubert; Molly is flirting disgracefully with that man—and it is a great shame, for he is so nice. Staying with his aunt, indeed!" she went on with unusual vehemence; "as if I did not know what brought him to stay with his aunt. If I had been alone here, I should never have let Molly out of my sight for a single minute."

"Then you can be more hard-hearted than I should ever have thought possible. As to Winwick, he is quite old enough to take care of himself; and as to Miss Molly—she is Miss Molly: so there is nothing more to be said."

As for the culprits themselves, they did not seem to care much about the society of the other two. The skates being settled to their satisfaction, they started off on a tour of inspection towards the far end of the lake, where there were not so many people; and gradually the islands hid them from view.

A couple of hours afterwards, Genie suddenly became aware of the fact that it was a very long time since she had seen her sister. Leaving the little group, with whom she had been practising figures of eight, she went in search of her brother, and having found him, she asked him, somewhat anxiously, "if he had seen Molly lately?"

"Why, my dear Genie," he exclaimed, "you are

like a hen with ducklings! Now, what do you suppose has happened to her?"

"Oh, I don't suppose anything has happened to her, as you call it; but all the same, I wish you would go down to the other end of the lake, and tell her, whenever you meet her, it is lunch-time. As for me, I shall employ myself taking off my skates, so as to be ready when you return; for it only wants about ten minutes to one."

"Very well. *Au revoir!*"

Genie took off her skates, and wandered about, talking first to one and then to another, till at last her brother reappeared—but still alone.

"Did you see anything of them?" she inquired, eagerly.

"Nothing; and as I have been round the whole lake, I think they must have found out how late it is, and gone home."

"Very likely; but I wonder we did not see them. Now I come to think of it, I did see Willie once in the distance. Perhaps he may have met them, and all gone home together through the wood: if so, there is no use in our hurrying; for they will not be at home yet, unless they started a long time ago."

"Did you see anything of the other children?"

"No: they were all to have come; but I suppose Miss Foster thought it too cold."

"I thought I caught a glimpse of Bill, too; but as I called out to him at the top of my voice, and he made no answer, I concluded I was mistaken."

When Hubert and his sister got in, they found the family had already gone in to lunch. Yes, they were all there, as Genie, on entering the dining-room, saw at a glance—all, with the exception of Miss Molly. Sir Geoffrey and Lady Anstruther, Miss Foster, Bill—the ten-year old boy—and the two "little ones"—pretty children of seven and eight.

"Where is Molly?" said the mother, looking up at their entrance.

"That's what we do not know," replied Hubert. "I suppose she must have left the lake at the farther end, and be coming home through the wood; if so, she could not be here just yet."

"Yes, that's where she is," remarked Bill; "I saw her go into the wood."

"Was she alone, Hubert?" asked his mother.

"Oh no! Winwick was with her. She is sure to be all right. I say, Bill," he went on, turning to his small brother, "if it was really you that was seen by the various members of the family playing down by the lake, why did you not answer when I called out to you?"

"Because I was collecting ice for the little ones,

who were not allowed to go out; and I did not want you to see me, for fear you should send me on a message."

"Delightful frankness of childhood!" began Hubert—but Genie interrupted him by asking Bill whether he had seen Molly after she had fairly reached the wood?

"Yes; I saw her once for a second through the trees."

"What was she doing?"

"Holding Mr Winwick's hand, and saying, 'No, no, no!'"

A shout of laughter from Hubert, that made his father look up and drop the 'Times,' interrupted Bill's reminiscences; and in the midst of the general confusion that ensued, Miss Molly walked into the room.

CHAPTER II.

FAIR AND FALSE.

"And so she flirted."—CAMPBELL.

"WHERE have you been, Molly?" inquired her mother, as soon as silence was re-established.

"I came back through the wood," she replied, more soberly than was her wont.

"I!" repeated her brother; "do you mean by that that you were quite alone, or alone in the sense of being accompanied by the 'object' only?"

"In the latter sense."

"What do you mean?" asked her father; "who was with you?"

"Mr Winwick, father. He proposed that we should walk home through the wood; and not having realised how far it was, it made us later than we intended."

"Did you ask him in to lunch?" asked her father, after a little pause.

"No," said Molly, hesitatingly.

Sir Geoffrey looked up surprised, and Hubert broke in with—

"Molly, I think I shall have to give you a certain little book I know of on 'Manners.' In that book you would be told, I should think, that it is *not* good manners to beguile a man down to skate with you, and persuade him to put on your skates, and furthermore make him bring you home by a road that took him at least two miles out of his way; and then, after this—shall we call it chivalrous behaviour on his part?—you turn upon the doorstep of your 'ancestral halls,' and say, 'I must leave you now, because lunch is ready!" and I daresay you added, 'Do come again to-morrow!'"

"That lecture being finished," said Miss Molly, who had quite recovered her presence of mind, "we can continue our conversation, father, which is slightly interrupted."

"Come round, and sit by me. You are not often inhospitable, Molly darling, so we will forgive you this time."

"Well, profit by my warning," Hubert called back from the doorway; "I am going out now, so I have no more time to-day, but we will take up the thread of our discourse another time. From what Bill says, it seems to me that you stand sorely in need of improvement."

"What has Bill been saying?"

"Oh, Bill says——" exclaimed one of the little ones. But before her voice could be heard, Lady Anstruther said—

"Miss Foster, I think the children need not wait any longer." And there was a general dispersion of the younger ones.

Ere they reached the door, however, Hubert's head reappeared at the window. Throwing up the sash, he called out—

"I say, Molly, you had better bind Bill over to keep the peace. He has been letting all sorts of cats out of any number of bags."

Before Genie's imploring "Hubert, Hubert!" or Molly's angry "What do you mean?" could reach him, he was gone.

That night, as the two girls sat in their room talking by the fire, before going to bed, Genie paused suddenly, in the operation of brushing her hair, to look up and say—

"What were you and Mr Winwick doing this morning, really, Molly?"

"It seems to me that that topic will never be exhausted, at least so far as you and Hubert are concerned. But once more, for your own especial benefit, I tell you that Mr Winwick and I walked home through the wood, and that as it was a good deal longer than your way, we naturally did not arrive as soon as you—*voilà tout!*"

"What had Mr Winwick to say for himself?"

"Oh, a great deal: that he had enjoyed his Christmas very much, and that he was sorry it was over, and all the other things that people usually say when they are going away."

"Was that really all?"

Miss Molly made no answer for a few minutes; then—

"Would you like to hear everything he said?"

"Certainly."

"Well, over and beyond all I have told you, he asked me if I would be his wife. Genie," she exclaimed, rising and throwing herself down on a low stool at her sister's feet, "pity me, for it was most awkward!"

"No, Molly, I do not pity you in the least; I warned you weeks ago what was coming, and you knew it just as well as I did. What on earth," she went on more excitedly, "made you give him such an opportunity as you did to-day? It serves you quite right; so I cannot be the least sorry for you."

"Oh but, Genie darling, you must help me! for it is a fearful state of affairs. See, I own everything. I was very wrong; but really and truly, I did not know he was so much in earnest. Oh, Genie, you must not desert me!"

"Tell me the whole story then," said Genie, in

softer tones, all her woman's curiosity roused at the prospect. "How did he begin?"

"I cannot tell you that; he went so quickly from jest to earnest that I hardly knew what he was saying or doing, till I found him holding my hand and imploring of me to become Mrs W.—only, of course, in far more poetical language."

"That was the moment," put in Genie, "that Bill saw you. I agree with Hubert so far, that it would be better on all future occasions to be sure that there are no eyewitnesses. Bill's anecdote, related to us at lunch to-day, would not sound well from any one else."

"What an imp of mischief that child is! I will give him a lecture to-morrow he will never forget."

"Take my advice and say nothing about it. He will be far more likely to forget it. But go on. Let me hear the end. What answer did you give?"

"I said, 'No, no,' at intervals; but he declared that he could not, would not, should not believe it, and that he would therefore take nothing from me then as final, but would wait till the night of the ball, a week hence, and see what I had to say then. And how he expects to find it out then, I don't know," she added, "as nothing would induce me to dance with him, or even speak to him, if I can help it."

"I should think, Molly, if that is the way you are going to behave, he will find out without any words what your answer is."

"Now, Genie, don't be angry, but help me as much as lies in your power, there's a dear! for my brain refuses to act; so if you will only think of something for me to do this time, I will never, never flirt again."

Despite Genie's knowledge of the worth of Molly's promises on that subject, her kind, sisterly heart was so touched, that before they separated for the night she had promised to do all that was in her power to stand as a shield between Molly and the "object" at Mrs Kingscote's ball.

CHAPTER III.

TAKE CARE, TAKE CARE.

"He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again."
—*Hamlet.*

It was late on the afternoon of the 15th that the Anstruthers drove up to the hospitable doors of Eversleigh Hall: and very glad they were to enter the house, and receive the kindly welcome of Mrs Kingscote; for the weather, which had been so bright and frosty the week before, had totally changed, and rainy days, cold winds, and damp mists had taken its place, making the long drive anything but a pleasant one.

The lady who had come down-stairs to meet them, and who, now that they had returned to the drawing-room, was engaged in removing their wraps and putting seats for them near the fire, and otherwise comforting them, was a woman no longer young, but who looked far younger than her real age, which must have been nearer sixty than fifty;

and yet she had known more griefs than most, and people sometimes wondered how it was she had managed to keep her youth so long.

She had been only a school-girl, not much over sixteen, when old Cecil Kingscote met her at some friend's house, where she was spending her Christmas holidays, and asked her to be his wife. It was at the eager request of the girl, who had never been beyond her own home except for the two years' schooling in London, that he had consented to spend the first year of his married life travelling on the Continent; and during their absence the old Hall in Shropshire was to be done up, in honour of the young wife.

The year had passed away; even Rachel's curiosity and excitement were calming down; and they had begun to talk of the day and hour when they were to enter together upon the new life in the far-away English home, without one thought—on her side, at any rate—of the length of years that lay between them, and of how, humanly speaking, the *end* of the life to which she looked forward with such deep joy must be trodden alone. Yes; the very day and hour were settled: they had already started, when

> "In Vienna's fatal walls, God's finger touched him,
> And he slept."

"Some low fever," the doctors said, afterwards,

"and not sufficient strength to resist it." That was all. And the glad, happy-hearted child-bride? When the blow first fell upon her—when she first heard that there was really no hope, and that her dreams of the future were over,—then, for the few hours of life that were left to him, courage and strength were given her to nurse him and watch over him, till he breathed his last. But after that,—after she had followed him to his grave, and there was nothing left for her to do but to return home—to the home he had prepared for her with such loving hands, and which he had never been able to show her,—then she had time to realise, as she had not been able to do before, the great desolation that had fallen upon her life.

For weeks she was almost stupefied with grief; but when at last she struggled back into life, having almost followed her husband into the "valley of the shadow," with the child that God had given her—the child who would see its father first in heaven—she, as it were, began her life again, dating it from the day when the baby was laid in her arms; and she was one of those happy people on whom worldly events make a deep but not saddening impression—so that, although no other love had ever superseded that first faithful love for Cecil Kingscote, and she had spent all her early womanhood uncared for and alone, saving for the child, yet for

all that, she had reached her sixty years with eyes still bright and hair still untouched with grey.

So much for the past; now for the present.

"I wish you could have persuaded your father and mother to bring you; but as that was impossible, it was very nice of them letting you girls come. I hope you will enjoy yourselves."

"Oh, we are sure to, dear Mrs Kingscote!" exclaimed Molly, kissing her; "I feel quite wild with excitement, merely at the prospect."

"It only needed that speech to show me which was which—for a moment I really was puzzled; but that could not be anybody but Molly. Now, Genie, let me have a good look at you. I suppose I shall learn to know you apart some day, even without hearing your voices; but you seem to grow more alike every time I see you. And now," she went on, "I have never introduced you to Miss Burnaby."

A girl who was sitting working by the fire looked up and bowed.

Rather a remarkable-looking girl was Miss Burnaby — remarkable for her utter want of colour. Her hair and complexion were alike so fair, that they took away from her any claims to beauty she might have had—the dark eyes being the one only redeeming point in a face not otherwise pretty; but it was a face that strangely at-

tracted people, for all that—there was such strength of will in every feature: one felt instinctively, in looking at her, that a battle with her would result in signal defeat. Now, however, as she laughed, and drank her tea, and talked of the coming ball, one forgot the determined mouth, and looked only at the dark eyes flashing in the firelight.

Shortly afterwards a dogcart was heard driving up; and as the front door was opened, a merry, boyish laugh reached the ears of the group by the fireside.

"They have come home!" exclaimed Mrs Kingscote. "Captain Burnaby always sends his laugh before him, as a sort of warning of his approach."

The door opened as she spoke and admitted two men; the first—Colonel Kingscote—a tall, slight man, brown-haired like his mother, with her bright smile and winning ways, but quieter than she had ever been; with something of the chivalrous, old-fashioned grace that has become so rare nowadays, and which he had inherited, with his blue eyes, from old Cecil Kingscote—the father he had never known. He came forward to answer his mother's eager questions as to what they had been doing, and to renew his acquaintance with Genie and Molly, whom, not being very often at home, at least for long together, he had not seen for several years.

Meanwhile, the friend who had entered the room with him, after being introduced to the girls, had walked over to his sister's side, and was conversing with her, in low tones, on the anxious subject as to whether some silk he had been asked to match for her was at all near the right shade. To settle the vexed question, they moved away to the window, to look at it by the fading light; and as they thus stand, it will be a good opportunity to give you a description of my hero —for my hero, I suppose, I must call him; though, perhaps, when I have finished my story, and you have heard all his faults and failings— ay, and his sins too—you will think him scarcely worthy of the name.

A big, broad-shouldered man, too broad-shouldered almost, some people said, for the small, beautiful-shaped head that he carried so proudly—that beautiful-shaped head being one of his few good points, for he was not at all a handsome man, at least not in the ordinary acceptation of the term, as he had not a single good feature in his face, excepting the dark eyes that were so like his sister's. But there was something about him that went further with women than mere good looks— at least so may be supposed, as it was not often that he set himself down to any siege but, however it might be prolonged, in the end he rose up

victorious. Not that he was at all conceited, or in any way given to boasting of his conquests, only that such was the fact; though, perhaps, it does not say much for the sense of his victims that it was so. Perhaps it was his strength, for women like to feel themselves conquered physically as well as morally.

As he leans over his sister, you can see how alike they are, although she is so small and he so big—the same fair complexions, the same dark eyes, only he possesses the dark hair, which in her is so much wanted.

"Come here, Captain Burnaby!" called Mrs Kingscote. "You must learn to know the twins apart before the evening, or you will be making all sorts of mistakes."

And not unwillingly Captain Burnaby obeyed.

"No, the yellow is not the least like the pattern I gave you," said his sister, as he walked away. "Whatever else you may be good at, it is not at matching silks."

But despite her blame, very proudly she looked after Rex Burnaby as he joined the little group by the fire. Ah, Winifred, make the most of the time when you may look proudly and kindly on him, for it may be that in some future years your heart may ache at the remembrance of what has been, and of what might have been!

A very pleasant hour was that one before the early, late dinner was announced, Captain Burnaby doing his best to learn to know the twins apart. He ought to have succeeded, if ever good intentions were successful in this world.

Dinner over, the girls went up to their room, to prepare for the great event of the evening.

"You must promise me the first dance," called out Captain Burnaby, as they vanished up-stairs; and Molly, looking back, said, "You should be more explicit; which of us do you mean?" and then disappeared before he had time to answer.

"I am more grieved than ever, Genie," she exclaimed, shutting the door behind her, "that he is not nearer being a major. Is he not fascinating?"

"Yes; you had better take care, Molly."

"No use warning me, dear. I have often tried to avoid pitfalls at your kind suggestions; but I have never succeeded yet, have I?"

"Well, you had much better be thinking of Mr Winwick, and of what you are going to say to him; it is a safer subject than Captain Burnaby's perfections."

"Oh, Genie, how unkind! I had just forgotten him, and now you have brought back all my troubles."

"I don't mean to be unkind, Molly dear; only I do think it would be advisable you should make

up your mind what you are going to say to him."

"I have a good mind to say 'Yes,' just to save the disagreeableness of refusing; but really, with Captain Burnaby in the room, I don't think I could."

"Molly," began Genie—but before she could conclude her remonstrance, a knock at the door interrupted them, and Mrs Kingscote entered.

"My dears, how pretty!" she exclaimed, looking admiringly at the bright, flushed faces before her; "but I think it would be only fair if you were to wear some distinguishing mark, for to a stranger you are so exactly alike. Take care, or you will have your sweethearts making dreadful mistakes! And talking of sweethearts, Molly, I must try and find one for you. How would you like Captain Burnaby, for instance? What do you think of him?" said the old lady, merrily.

"Think of him!" exclaimed Molly, laughingly; "as far as I can judge on such a short acquaintance, I should think he was perfect!"

"That sounds promising, Genie, does it not?"

"I am afraid, Mrs Kingscote, Molly has found so many men perfect already, that it is impossible to judge by that.'"

"What a character, Molly! But never mind; don't think Captain Burnaby perfect, because he is

not—he has no money. And money, my dear, I am afraid, goes further than most things nowadays."

"Money is nothing," said Molly, grandly.

"Oh, if it has come to that, and you are so very far gone, we can say nothing, Genie, can we? So I will go down-stairs and see what he thinks about you."

"Do," replied Molly; "and be sure and tell me what he says." And Mrs Kingscote left them.

The ball proved quite as enjoyable as Molly had predicted; she certainly did her best to amuse herself—let us hope she succeeded. Once Mrs Kingscote came up, and asked Genie, with an amused smile, if she thought Molly was trying to find out if Captain Burnaby was as fascinating as the world in general declared him to be; and Genie answered, "that to a looker-on it appeared like it:" and then, before Mrs Kingscote could say any more, Cecil claimed her for a waltz.

Several times Genie looked round for Mr Winwick, but she did not see him. She had been near the door when he entered, and she had heard him go up directly and ask Molly for a dance, and she, without looking up, replied coldly, "No, thank you; I am engaged." And Genie was angry when she saw the pained look in his honest eyes as he turned away; and yet, what could she advise Molly to do?

Once, when she was standing alone, she saw that Mr Winwick was close beside her; and determining to make up as much as possible for her sister's coldness, she went and spoke to him.

"Ah, how do you do, Mr Winwick? I have not had a chance of speaking to you all the evening."

"Have I been so forgetful as not to ask for one dance? Perhaps it was because I knew I should not have much chance. I"—but before he could get any further, Captain Burnaby's voice, saying, "I beg your pardon!" made them both look up, and for a minute they were divided to make way for Captain Burnaby and Miss Molly to pass through to the other room. They were talking and laughing merrily; but as they passed, and Molly looked up and met Mr Winwick's reproachful gaze, a burning blush spread over her cheeks, and she drooped her long eyelashes for a minute quite abashed, but before they were out of sight, her sweet laugh was heard again. Mr Winwick watched them for a few minutes, and then he turned back to Genie with a little sigh. "I was in the middle of saying something to you when your sister interrupted us; what was it? Oh, I know—I was apologising for past rudeness, and I was just going to tell you that I was on my way home now; so, in fact, this is a last good-bye!"

"Not really a last one, I hope?" said Genie, kindly.

"I am afraid so. I leave so early, that I don't think I shall have time to come over and see you to-morrow."

"Well, good-bye, then," said Genie; "and good luck go with you."

Their hands met for an instant, and he was gone.

As they were going to bed that night, Molly stood for a long time watching the moon sailing in the sky above her, for the mists and rain had cleared away, and it was a bright, clear night.

"You don't seem tired," said her sister at last, she having been in bed some time before Molly even looked round.

"Tired! no," exclaimed Molly, turning her glad young face towards her sister; "I am too happy to be tired."

"Take care," said Genie, starting up and looking at her, "or you will be falling in love again. But I really do wish one thing, Molly, and that is, that you would get one 'object' out of the neighbourhood safely before you begin with another. It quite spoilt my evening seeing Mr Winwick loitering about and trying to speak to you."

"Too late, Genie, to offer that advice; I *am* in love, as you might have known by the way I have

been looking at the moon. For the nineteenth time! So pity me! As to Mr Winwick, I consider that I managed very well about him—not speaking to him made it so much easier and pleasanter both for him and me. Don't you think so?" But Genie did not reply. Either she would not agree, and was too tired to disagree, or she was asleep. So Molly blew out the candle and jumped into bed; and whatever other effect being in love might have upon her, it did not keep her awake.

CHAPTER IV.

SMOOTH WATERS.

"Sculptors of life are we as we stand
With our lives uncarved before us,
Waiting the time, when at God's command
Our life-dream shall pass o'er us."

No model heroine was Miss Molly, as perhaps you have discovered by this time, and very late was it next morning before she made her appearance. When she opened the dining-room door, Miss Burnaby and her sister were standing talking together by the window.

"Well, Molly," said Genie, "do you feel refreshed? Fancy Miss Burnaby, I got up and dressed, and came down-stairs, and she never even turned round!"

"An easy conscience," responded Molly, coolly. "I have often remarked that very few people can sleep after a ball. It is the knowledge of evil that keeps them awake, and harasses them out of bed at unearthly hours."

"Well, I am afraid," said Miss Burnaby, "I must plead guilty to a very evil conscience, for I don't think I have slept more than an hour altogether."

"Poor thing!" remarked Molly, sitting down and pouring out her coffee; "how different to me! I had scarcely laid my head on my pillow before I was oblivious of everything. Where are you going to?" she continued, seeing that they did not seem to be inclined to settle down.

"Miss Burnaby and I were going out to take a turn in the garden; we thought we should feel all the fresher for it—that is, if you do not mind a lonely breakfast."

"Oh, don't think of me. I deserve no consideration for being so late. But am I really the last?"

"The last but Rex," said Miss Burnaby, turning back from the doorway to address her.

When they had left, Miss Molly proceeded to make herself quite comfortable, according to her own ideas, which consisted in propping the 'Times' open in front of her at the "Military Intelligence;" for no lieutenant, eagerly watching day by day for his promotion in the Gazette, took more interest in that part of the paper than she did. So absorbed was she, that she never heard the door open, or any sound in the room, till

Captain Burnaby stood before her, holding out his hand.

'Are we the first, Miss Anstruther?"

"No; the last."

"So much the better; we are the less likely to be disturbed."

He sat down as he spoke, but not without an admiring glance at the girl opposite. She, however, took very little notice of his glances. With a sigh she put down the 'Times.'

"I am afraid politeness requires me to do this," she said, turning her laughing face towards him. "And I have not finished the advertisement sheet yet, which is a matter of daily duty with me."

"Yes, certainly; you will have plenty of time for that afterwards. Now I really must ask you to pour out my coffee for me."

"I obey." She moved round to the head of the table as she spoke.

"Thank you very much. Now that you have been so obliging, I will permit you to go on with the perusal of the morning paper. May I open it for you at the leading article?"

"No, thank you; but please give it me, for there is something in it I very much want to see."

She took it out of his hand, and moved over with it to the window, where she seated herself in one of the deep sills.

Captain Burnaby did not again attempt to disturb her literary endeavours, but often and often his looks strayed to the figure in the window. "A very pretty girl," was his mental comment, after a longer glance than usual—"a very pretty girl!" And certainly he was not far wrong. Presently he got up and walked over to her side.

"May I ask, Miss Anstruther, what it is you are so interested in? Not the advertisement sheet still, I presume?"

"Nothing you would care about," she replied quickly, shutting up the paper as she spoke, very decidedly; "and now, I see, you have done your breakfast, and I have long ago finished mine—so let us go and look for the others."

As they opened the door they met Mrs Kingscote coming down.

"Good morning, my dear," she said, kissing Molly. "Good morning, Captain Burnaby; have you seen Cecil?"

"Yes; he is out in the stables, where I am just going to join him: so good-bye for the present. We are going, I believe, to drive into Shrewsbury shortly; so if anybody wants commissions done, and can trust me, after seeing Winifred's silk, give them to me."

"No, Captain Burnaby—thanks very much; but I have known Cecil too long ever to give a man a

commission. And now, dear Molly"—turning to her—"let us go into the drawing-room, and see whether your sister is there."

"Yes, we are here," called out Genie, as they opened the door. "It was too cold and miserable to stay out any longer; so, after seeing over the stables, we decided on coming in."

"Then I am sure, if Cecil took you over them, you must be frozen to death. I know so well what that means. Really, my principal object in rejoicing that old age had come upon me was, that I could not be asked to look at the horses any more. As I used to tell Cecil, horses *out* of a carriage were to me such thoroughly uninteresting animals, that I did not even care to see them. It used to make him very angry at one time, but he has got past caring now."

The girls laughed at this peculiar description of a horse, and Mrs Kingscote went on—

"But now, my dears, you must all tell me how you enjoyed yourselves last night, and what you did and said, and what every one did and said to you."

She took out her knitting as she spoke, and poking the fire into a blaze, sat down beside it.

"Oh, dear Mrs Kingscote!" exclaimed Molly, throwing herself down on a low stool at her feet, "I will tell you my view of it first. I don't

think I was ever so perfectly happy in all my life. I certainly never enjoyed anything more."

"That quite satisfies me, Molly darling; for I do like people to be happy," Mrs Kingscote answered, stroking the girl's bright hair. "And you, Genie?"

"I can only echo Molly's words."

Mrs Kingscote glanced inquiringly at Miss Burnaby, who bent a little closer over her work. In reply to the glance, however, she looked up and said—

"I am scarcely a fair judge, because I never was at a ball before; but certainly it was a very pleasant beginning."

"Never at a ball before?" questioned Molly.

"No. I have been nursing in a hospital in London; and before that I was too young to go anywhere."

"Oh, how good you must be!" exclaimed Molly, almost involuntarily.

Miss Burnaby made no reply; but she drew her smooth brows together, and a look of pain saddened the beautiful eyes as she went on with her work. An awkward pause ensued, which Mrs Kingscote broke by saying, with a little laugh—

"How many times did you dance with Mr Winwick last night, Molly?"

The slightest extra tinge of pink on Molly's

cheek was the only outward sign that the question was not a pleasant one as she answered, "Not once."

Genie looked up nervously, and Mrs Kingscote repeated, "Not once, Molly! Why, I thought he was the most steadfast of your admirers!"

"We have had a quarrel, for which," said Molly, magnanimously, "I take the whole of the blame, as I was entirely in the wrong; but as nothing would induce me to say so to him, you see we are not likely to make it up, are we? He goes away to-day, too, so I should have no opportunity of doing so, even if I wished—fortunately, I think. But don't you say anything to him," she added, quickly; turning her pretty young face round to the old lady; "I don't even *want* to be friends again."

"Under those circumstances, I don't think any one is likely to undertake the office of peacemaker between you," interposed Genie, before Mrs Kingscote could reply; and she, perceiving it was a disagreeable subject, said no more.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Molly, looking round a few minutes later, "you are all working now; I hoped that Genie would have kept my idleness in company. Now, however, I suppose"—with a little sigh—"I *must* go and get something to do. But you can have no idea, Mrs Kingscote, how I hate work!"

"My dear child, you are quite at liberty to do nothing, as far as I am concerned."

"I take you at your word," replied Miss Molly, promptly, dropping once more on to her lowly seat.

Genie laughed. "I never attempted to dissuade her; for I knew that even if she had got as far as her own room, she would have returned empty-handed. I never saw any one but Molly who could sit the whole day, or at any rate a good many hours of it, doing absolutely nothing."

"It is my mind, Genie," remarked her sister; "it is so great that it cannot be turned to such trifles as work. But I'll tell you what I will do, —I will get a book and read aloud, if you would like."

"Oh do!" said Miss Burnaby, who had not spoken since the little episode of the ball; "that would be perfect."

And between working and reading, interspersed with a good deal of talking, the morning wore away pleasantly enough.

After lunch, the gentlemen not having returned, and they not being expected much before dinner, Mrs Kingscote proposed that they should all drive into Shrewsbury also, for some shopping that she wanted.

"Oh please do, Mrs Kingscote, for I should like to try and match that silk Rex succeeded so very badly with yesterday."

"Well, I think if it does not make any difference to you," said Molly, "I will stay at home, and write to mother."

"Very well, dear. Are you sure, though, you don't mind being left alone; for I think we shall be gone all the afternoon?"

"Oh no; don't think of me. I shall write my letter, and then amuse myself with a book till you return."

Miss Burnaby and Genie walked up-stairs together. They rather fraternised, these two; perhaps it was their both being so quiet, though in such different ways.

"What a curious girl your sister is!" said Miss Burnaby; "I don't think I ever met any one just like her before. There is a wonderful fascination about her, don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Genie, enthusiastically; "I don't think there is any one like Molly."

"I wanted to say something to her, but I did not like to before Mrs Kingscote," went on Miss Burnaby; "but I will tell you, and you can repeat it to her. It was not in the least good of me going to London as a nurse. I did it purely to please myself. I will tell you the whole story some day," she broke off, suddenly; "only you must never think, or let her think, it was right of me doing as I did."

Not another word passed between the two girls on the subject then. Genie felt rather mystified, but did not like to ask any questions, and so remained silent. Miss Burnaby was not very talkative either for a long time after they had started on their drive. In the strict, conscientious view she always took of everything, she feared she had led Molly to think more highly of her than was due; and rather than what she conceived to be wrong should go on, she had determined to tell her a story that few had hitherto heard. But she was proud, and she knew the telling of it would cost her something; but then, again, she was too proud to let any one think of her as better than she was.

CHAPTER V.

STOLEN KISSES.

"L'amour n'est jamais égal."

DIRECTLY the others had started, Miss Molly set about writing her letter home. "Dearest Mother," —she got as far as that easily, but there many and great difficulties arose. She felt it was incumbent on her to say something about the ball. Of course, she could say she had enjoyed it immensely; but there was nothing very exciting to the home-world in that. What they would like to hear would be the little details. It did not sound well, however, to say, "I danced nearly the whole evening with Captain Burnaby, and I did not even speak to Mr Winwick," which would have been pretty nearly the truth. For that might have given rise to unpleasant questions, such as, "Why did you not dance with Mr Winwick?" and, "Why did you dance to such a great extent with Captain Burnaby?" No; that would never do.

"I will think it over," she at last decided; "and in the meantime I will read."

She walked all round the book-shelves, looking for something particularly tempting; and at last, on the very top shelf, she perceived a book which she had actually begun in some bygone time and never finished. It was too high to be reached, even with the aid of a chair; but she remembered that in a corner of the room stood a pair of steps, kept there expressly for the purpose. She pulled them out with a little laugh at all the trouble she was taking. "But never mind," she thought; "when I am comfortably established in that arm-chair," glancing at one that stood by the fire, "I shall consider myself well repaid for my trouble." Alas! much has been already said on the great rapidity with which all earthly hopes of happiness fall to the ground, and much yet remains to be said. No sooner was she perched on the top step of the ladder, with the book open in her hands to see whether it were really the one she was in search of, than the door opened, and Mr Winwick walked into the room.

Utter astonishment prevented Molly speaking for fully a minute; and then the astonished "I thought you were to have left this morning!" did not certainly sound very gracious or conciliatory.

"Yes, but I could not go, Miss Anstruther, without

the answer to my question, which, you remember, you were to have given me at the ball."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Molly, hotly; and so excited was she, that she made no attempt to descend from her eminence. "I gave you my answer most decidedly that day in the wood."

"I did not take it as such. I told you I would not, at the time. I waited for it all last night," he added, in a sadder voice.

She made no answer; only for once in her life she looked thoroughly uncomfortable. Hers was *not* a pleasant situation; and she felt it did not tend to make it less awkward being perched on the top of those high steps.

There was a long, uncomfortable pause, while he stood looking at her, and then he spoke again—

"Come down then, Miss Anstruther, and shake hands, and wish me good-bye; for I fear that there is no hope of making you change your mind."

Quickly Miss Molly rose to her feet at those words and commenced her downward journey. The prospect of his going so soon caused her infinite relief. Slowly and carefully she descended the ladder,—no easy task; but Molly was not one to be disturbed by trifles,—till she stood on the third step from the bottom, when Mr Winwick made a step forward and held out his hand to assist her. She took it quietly and graciously.

What would she not have done then, with the feeling that this was really the last "good-bye;" and that, in all probability, they would never meet again? And with this thought in her heart, she looked up at him all smiles, and said softly—

"Good-bye. I am sorry, you know; but I never thought——" The rest of the sentence was left unfinished, for Mr Winwick had his arm round her and was kissing her passionately.

For a second, surprise and wild anger kept Miss Molly from speaking; and then with all her strength she freed herself, and stood with crimson cheeks and startled eyes looking at him, while a storm of angry words escaped her.

"How dare you?" she exclaimed—"how dare you? What have I ever done to you, that you should treat me like this? Of all the cowardly things I ever heard of"—but she could get no further; she threw herself down on the chair by the fire and sobbed bitterly. For a few minutes Mr Winwick stood at the foot of the steps, looking at the girlish figure crouching down in the depths of the velvet arm-chair, and then he walked over to her side and touched her hand.

"Miss Anstruther—Molly," he began, penitently; but she made no answer, save to move her hand away from his. "Do look up; I beg your pardon so heartily. I can't even yet think it was myself.

I am so ashamed," he went on, disjointedly; "just say you forgive me, and I will go directly. You might, Molly, for you know how I love you."

She started up at that with flaming cheeks, and eyes in which the tears still stood. "Love me!" she cried, angrily, "when you can treat me like that! I repeat again, it was most ungenerous to take such advantage of finding me here alone."

"I acknowledge it all, Miss Molly, only say 'I forgive you,' and shake hands."

"Don't call me that," she interrupted; "it is not your name for me. And as to shaking hands—indeed I will not," she exclaimed, standing up and facing him on the hearthrug. "But don't *wait* for that," she went on as steadily as her trembling lips would allow her.

"Oh, Molly, I am so sorry!" and he held out his hand again. "Do say good-bye!"

"Certainly not," she repeated; and as she spoke she clasped her two hands tightly together behind her back.

Without another word he walked to the door. With his hand on the lock, he hesitated while one might count ten, looking at her to see if a shadow of relenting might come. If any hope had risen up in his heart, it died out then and for ever, as his eyes fell on the slight figure standing on the

hearthrug, and on the white angry face turned towards him.

With a little sigh he opened the door and went; and once more Miss Molly was left alone.

Directly the door had closed behind her visitor, she again climbed the steps, and again took down the book that had cost her so dear, and which at Mr Winwick's entrance she had put back into its place; then drawing the chair up to the fire, she sat down to read. The attempt was not a very successful one: more and more often her eyes wandered to the red coals before her, where a long story was making itself visible—which story had begun some four weeks before, and had been ended somewhat abruptly that very day.

Impatiently she turned her eyes back to her book, and tried hard to feel that interest in it she wished to. It was useless; and so at last she declared it was too dark to see anything, and determined to shut her eyes and think.

Gradually, as she sat thus, the book slipped from her hand; Mr Winwick and Captain Burnaby mixed themselves up in inextricable confusion; and the "land of dreams" was reached.

So soundly did she sleep, that she never heard the door open, or any one enter. Some one did, however,—some one who stood for a minute or so watched her without a word, for fear of awakening

her—and that was Captain Burnaby. He stood, as I said, in the doorway, looking at her admiringly, as he had looked at her once before that day. And it was a pretty enough picture to be worth the watching. She was leaning back in the crimson velvet chair, her two hands in her lap and her feet crossed on the stool in front of her, and the book, which was to have made her happy all the afternoon, lying on the ground beside her, where it had fallen from her slight hold.

Captain Burnaby's meditations were broken in upon by Colonel Kingscote's voice behind him.

"Anybody at home, Rex?"

"Yes," replied Rex, his dark eyes dancing with fun as he pointed to the sleeping figure in the firelight. "Hush," he added, as he stepped forward. He picked up the ill-used novel and touched Miss Molly's hand gently with it. She started up directly, with a wild, frightened look in her pretty eyes; but before she could say anything, Captain Burnaby remarked—

"My number in gloves is 8½, and I should like the colour to be dark grey, please."

Molly's powers of speech had quite returned by the time he had concluded.

"Bring a witness, Captain Burnaby. I take nothing, believe nothing, without proof. Oh, Colonel Kingscote, you are there, are you? Were you a witness?"

"Certainly not. I refuse to be mixed up in any business transactions between you."

"What a shame to desert me, Kingscote! Well, Miss Anstruther, if you require a witness, and I cannot produce one, there is nothing more to be said."

"Oh yes, indeed there is," began Molly; "I do not yet in the least allow that I was even dozing." Colonel Kingscote and Captain Burnaby both laughed at her serious face; and while they were in the middle of arguing the question as to how nearly asleep one must be not to be aware of what is going on around, the others came in.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs Kingscote.

"We are trying, mother, to convince Miss Anstruther she was asleep when we returned."

"It looked so like it," went on Captain Burnaby, —"so like it too, the way she started up on seeing us, we might have been ghosts at the least. I maintain, and always shall, that she was talking in her sleep full five minutes after we were in the room."

"Well, I am afraid we must give up the argument," said Colonel Kingscote. "And, moreover, I fear we have not convinced each other in the least, so that we are exactly as we were. By the by, mother, did you see in the paper that our regiment goes to Hounslow directly? I am so thankful to think we have done with Ireland, at any rate for the present."

"Yes; so Molly told me — she saw it this morning."

"Are you a great 'Times' reader, then, Miss Anstruther?"

Molly looked up and saw Captain Burnaby's laughing eyes fixed upon her.

"No, Colonel Kingscote," she answered, readily enough; "I always look to see if any one I know anything about is mentioned in the 'Military Intelligence;' but I am afraid I don't go much beyond *that*—and the advertisement sheet. Unfortunately, this morning my trouble was thrown away, as I did not see one name I knew. Of course, excepting yours," she added, with a sweet little laugh. "I told Mrs Kingscote of it, because I knew she would be so delighted to hear of your final destination directly it was in print."

This was Miss Molly's small revenge for Captain Burnaby's amused smile. She looked at him as she said it; and he evidently, by the expression of his face, took it as such—and what was more, did not care in the least about it.

Molly felt angry, she knew not why; and more angry still did she become when he said in a low voice, as he opened the door for them to go upstairs—

"If I *should* happen to be down in time to-

morrow, I shall know where to have the 'Times' open for you."

Without a word she walked past him up to her own room. A kind of feeling was upon her which she could not have defined, even to herself — a sort of sensation of approaching peril; perhaps a shadow from the dark future cast across her bright path.

CHAPTER VI.

SAD THINGS ARE AYE TOO TRUE.

Ay de mi! Like echoes falling,
Sweet, and sad, and low,
Voices come at night recalling
Years, and years ago.

THAT evening, when they were all seated in the drawing-room after dinner, Genie suddenly said—

"Molly, did you write to the mother this afternoon?"

"Oh no!" exclaimed Molly; "I forgot all about it till this minute! I began a letter, and then——"

"Then you fell asleep, I should think," remarked Captain Burnaby.

"I am afraid, Miss Anstruther," said Colonel Kingscote, "that this does look suspicious."

"Not in the least, Colonel Kingscote; I did not write because I was otherwise employed."

"Ah!" exclaimed Captain Burnaby; "what was the employment? It was not working, I am sure;

and it was not reading, because your book was lying on the floor, you remember?"

"If I were Miss Anstruther," said his sister, "I should feel inclined to remind you that it was no business of yours."

"My dear Winifred, you cannot understand. This is a most important piece of evidence. If Miss Anstruther was really employed, and she can prove it—well, then, of course, she proves she was not asleep."

"I can prove it," said Molly, with a little defiant glance at Genie—"that is, if you will take my word for it; for the witness has left the neighbourhood. I was engaged in entertaining a visitor—Mr Winwick."

"Oh, indeed!" said Captain Burnaby; "then I am quite convinced you were not asleep."

"No, not near it," said Molly; and she reddened as she remembered how very wide awake she had been.

"What did Mr Winwick say, my dear?" asked Mrs Kingscote. "I thought he had gone. And by the way," she added, "did you make up your quarrel?—it was a splendid opportunity!"

"No; although I entertained him this afternoon most politely, I do not feel more like making it up with him. On the contrary——" She stopped; and Mrs Kingscote becoming suddenly aware of her blushes and hesitating speech, said kindly—

"Do give us one song, Molly, before we go to bed." And very willingly she obeyed, only too glad to avoid any more questions.

Perhaps Miss Molly was not possessed of very many accomplishments — some of her friends were wont to say, rather maliciously, that she had nothing to recommend her save her pretty face. But any one who had once heard her sing could never say that; and so Colonel Kingscote, who was a musician in his way, thought as he listened to her, for her voice was simply perfect.

A low, sweet contralto—such a sad voice, too, that he wondered unconsciouly, as he looked at the happy face, how it could be so.

As she finished her song, he rose and began looking through her music.

"Don't stop, Miss Anstruther, please; I must have one more."

Miss Molly was not difficult to be persuaded.

"What would you like?" she said, graciously. "Did you ever hear this?" she went on, taking up a piece and playing the first few notes. And then, without waiting for an answer, she began singing. It was the lament of Mary Stuart, set to some old French air; and as the pathetic words rang through the room, in that low, sweet voice, there was no one present who did not seem to see "The

Fair White Queen," weeping her bitter tears for the country of her happy childhood:—

" Si, en quelque séjour,
Soit en bois, soit en prée,
Soit sur l'aube du jour,
Ou soit sur la vesprée,
Sans cesse mon cœur sent
Le regret d'un absent!"

"Le regret d'un absent!" repeated Colonel Kingscote, with a sigh; "it is years since I last heard those words.

"When was it?" questioned Miss Molly.

Before answering, Colonel Kingscote glanced round, to see if he was out of hearing of the others; but where they two sat they were quite alone, for the room was very long, and the piano quite at the far end of it.

"When was it?" repeated Colonel Kingscote; "would you like to hear?"

"Oh, please tell me," said Molly, gently, for she saw there was a sad story coming.

There was something about Miss Molly, despite her gaiety and light-heartedness, that often persuaded people to take her into their confidence about things they would never have dreamed of telling any one else. She sometimes told Genie that she thought she must know the love-stories of all the neighbourhood; and perhaps it was a certain

soft sympathising look in her eyes that prompted Colonel Kingscote to tell her that little story so few people knew.

"It was in India," he began, "years ago, when I went out there to join my regiment, that I met him first."

"Who was he?" questioned Molly.

"The greatest friend I ever had," replied Colonel Kingscote; "his name was Harry Lane. You would laugh if I were to tell you about him, and say I was exaggerating; but I think it would be impossible to do that about him and his perfections. I was a young fellow then, and I suppose the young are apt to have some hero, and he was mine. Not that he was so very much older than I was, only that he seemed so to me then. But I thought him at that time, and after all these years still think him, the cheeriest, kindliest comrade that I ever met. At last we were ordered home. Did I tell you he was one of 'Ours'? No? Well, he was—our colonel by that time. When we had once fairly started, you can imagine the state of excitement we were all in. Two evenings after we had left India, as I sat on deck talking to him, and questioning him as to where he was going when we landed, though that time was far enough off—for then it was not a matter of days getting to England—you can imagine my horror when he replied

that he should go home as soon as ever he arrived —that is to say, he added, if he lived to reach England.

"'What do you mean?' I exclaimed, starting to my feet. And then he told me that he knew his days were numbered, and that all he hoped was, that he might live to see his home.

"I think, Miss Anstruther, in all my life—in which, certainly, I have known a fair amount of trouble—I never felt anything more than that: but I was very young, you see; and I suppose the young do feel things more.

"As the time passed, I saw for myself that his words had truth in them; for day by day he seemed to me to do less, and to look less fit for this world. One night, as we sat together, he told me that he was to have been married directly he arrived—'and that, Kingscote,' he said, 'is the principal reason that I am so anxious to live till I reach England.'

"'Oh yes,' I replied, cheerfully; 'of course you will, and a long time afterwards, I hope,'—but my heart doubted, even while my lips spoke. He shook his head—'I am afraid not: but that is the only thing I grieve about really; for, poor girl! she has waited so long and patiently for my return. We have been engaged,' he added, 'for four years.' And then, in a sudden burst of confidence, he told me that the engagement was not acknowledged by

the family, who had forbidden any promise till he returned from India. 'And I agreed,' he went on; 'for of course it would have been cruel to have kept her bound to me all these years. But still, to ourselves it is the same thing.'

"'Do you correspond?' I asked.

"'No,' he replied. I suppose there must have been some doubt in my voice, though I did not intend it, for he said quickly, 'I would answer for Helen's faith with my life! As for me——' He said no more, but broke off into that very song you were just now singing—a favourite one of his.

"The weeks passed slowly away after that; and at last, one morning the glad cry was heard that England was in sight.

"I hurried up on deck, and there I saw with joyful eyes the white cliffs shining in the sun. I ran down-stairs to call my friend. He was in the saloon writing in his journal, with a pleased smile on his face; and as I burst into the room, he was humming the refrain of that same song—

'Sans cesse mon cœur sent,
Le regret d'un absent.'

"'Come up directly, colonel!' I called, in an excited voice· 'England is in sight!' He started up with a quick, loud cry, and fell down dead at my feet! Heart-disease, I was told afterwards, and

that the shock of hearing my news so suddenly had killed him." Colonel Kingscote broke off, and there were tears in Molly's dark eyes.

"Oh, how dreadfully sad!" she exclaimed; and then, after a moment's pause, "And the lady? Did you see her after you landed? How *did* you tell her?"

"The lady," said Colonel Kingscote, in a hard voice; "oh, the lady, when I found her, had been married for three months; so she did not want much consoling! But you can understand why I was glad then, and am glad still, that my dear friend never lived to see England; and you can understand, also, why that song called up such sad memories, for I have never heard it since Harry Lane died!"

"Poor man!" said Molly, softly; and then angrily, "How could she?"

"Ah, very easily, I am afraid. *Les absents ont toujours tort;* don't you know?"

"Not at all," began Molly—but her eager protestations were drowned in the general move towards bed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIGHT PATH AND THE WRONG.

"She has two eyes, so soft and brown;
Take care—take care."

VERY pleasantly the time passed after that. Eversleigh Hall was a delightful house to stay at; Mrs Kingscote a perfect hostess; and what with riding, walking, and long drives into the neighbourhood, the week had passed into a fortnight almost imperceptibly. But now the time of the Anstruthers' departure was finally decided on. This was Monday. On the Tuesday evening they were going to have some *tableaux vivants* — the rehearsals for which had been the excuse for their stay; and on the Wednesday they were to leave.

The day before, on their way home from church, Miss Burnaby had said to Genie, with whom she was walking, "I will tell you now about my nursing in London. I should like you to know about it before we part."

"Oh, don't," said Genie, "if you have any feeling about doing so. Pray don't!"

"No; I should like you to know it, Genie—may I call you Genie?—for you cannot judge of me fairly till you have heard of this part of my life. You know," she went on, "that my mother died when I was quite young, only about twelve?" Genie nodded.

"Well, besides myself and Rex, whom you know, there are, or rather were," she added, with a sad look in her dark eyes, "two other brothers,—one older than Rex, his name is Arthur; the other, the little one, was only born when she died."

"What is the other one like?" questioned Genie. "I seem to know you two so well, I should like to hear about your home."

"What is Arthur like?" repeated Winifred; "he is like what our mother was, I believe—at least so my father says; but then, perhaps, he is prejudiced, for Arthur is as much his favourite as Rex is mine. But I must go on with my story. When I was about seventeen, I took a violent fancy to go to a hospital in London. A friend of mine had done the same thing; but then I never stopped to consider whether I, the only daughter in a large house, with no mother to care for things at home, was at all in the same position to choose what I would like as my friend, a childless widow.

"I stopped to think of nothing. I entreated and implored of my father, who had never refused me anything; and at last he gave his consent, though sorely against his will, that I should go for three months, and try how I liked it. I went, Genie. When I returned home, it was to find that the little child that my dead mother had left to my care, whom with her dying breath she had implored me to guard, was dead!" She broke off, for her eyes were full of tears.

Genie took her hand in hers. "You must not blame yourself too much, Winifred," she said, tenderly. "Of course I cannot judge whether you were right or wrong in going; but perhaps, as you were so fond of him, it was merciful you were not with him when he died. How was it you did not come back?"

"They sent for me," she replied; "but I was out of town when the letter arrived, having gone with a patient to the seaside, and by the time I got home he was dead—of diptheria."

Her tears were flowing fast now, and very glad was Genie that they had arrived at home.

She went up with her to her own room, and made her lie down; and then having kissed her fondly, she told her she would tell Mrs Kingscote she had a bad headache—"which I am sure, dear, is the case," she added, looking at the shadows under

the dark eyes—"and cannot come down," and then left her.

But before she reached the door, Winifred called her back. "You must tell me now," she said, "what you think of me. Don't try to flatter me by saying my story has made no difference, because that is impossible; but don't hesitate to say so, for I am hard—at least so people say—and being hard has certain advantages at times. Now tell me," she went on, sitting up in her eagerness; "do! I don't know why it is, but I feel so anxious to know your opinion of me."

"I have not the least hesitation," replied Genie, "in telling you what difference your story has made in my opinion of you, for that it has made a difference I do not pretend to deny. And that is, that whereas before I liked you and admired you, now I love you and admire you—admire you as one that can do wrong, and can see that it is wrong, and acknowledge it. Not another syllable now," she said, stopping the eager words that rose to the listener's lips with a kiss. "Not another word now; you can tell me all you have to say another time."

It was a Monday, the day after this little confidence of Miss Burnaby's, and they were all seated at lunch, consulting as to what they were to do in the afternoon. "I think the Miss Anstruthers

ought to go to Langley Priory, as they have never seen it," said Colonel Kingscote. "Fancy having lived all these years so near it, Miss Molly, and never having been!"

"It is almost too far from our house for a drive; so I, for one, should like to go immensely," replied Molly—"that is to say, if every one else agrees with me."

On those occasions every one always votes in favour of a decided voice, and so it was in this case.

"How will you go?" asked Mrs Kingscote.

"I think we had better take the little carriage, and the dogcart, mother—that is to say, if Miss Burnaby will drive, and let me sit behind and open gates for her."

"Oh, you had better drive the dogcart!" exclaimed Captain Burnaby; "I——" but Colonel Kingscote interrupted him.

"No, my good fellow; you would have to shorten yourself by many feet before you could manage to get gracefully, and without inconvenience to yourself or others, into the back seat of our little carriage."

And so it was settled as Colonel Kingscote had proposed.

There was some discussion at starting as to who should go with who; but when Mrs Kingscote

came out to ask whether they were sure they had plenty of wraps and were quite comfortable, she smiled as she saw Captain Burnaby and Miss Molly seated in the dogcart. As she entered into the house, the smile turned into something that was almost a sigh at the remembrance of her own short, sweet romance, that had so strangely coloured and shaded the whole remainder of her life.

It was a long drive to Langley Priory, and Captain Burnaby and Molly arrived some time before the others. Putting up their horse at a farmhouse, they proceeded to go and look about them. In summer-time there were always plenty of artists about, sketching the ruined Priory, and pretty little deserted chapel; but now, in this dreary winter weather, people must be, as Mrs Kingscote had told them, very hard up for amusement before they would dream of going there. But Langley Priory possessed one attraction over and above the ruins, and one which every visitor always went to see, and that was a great Druidical stone, laid across two others. It was said to possess the usual power attributed to these stones—namely, that any one standing upon it and wishing, would have his wish granted before the year was out. While they were making their way to the spot where the stones were, Miss Molly perceived the others coming towards them. She waited a minute for

them to reach her side, and then exclaiming "I am determined to have the first wish!" she ran forward as fast as she could. Directly he had grasped her intention, Captain Burnaby started in eager pursuit; but when he arrived at the "Giant's Rock," as the stones were called, Miss Molly was standing there breathless, waiting for him.

"The first wish is yours," said Colonel Kingscote, "by every right of first appearance, and I hope your earnestness may propitiate the fairies."

"Thank you very much," said Miss Molly; and then with his help she climbed up to the top.

"No one speak now for a minute," she said, imperiously, "while I think of something to wish for."

"You *are* to be envied!" exclaimed Colonel Kingscote; "fancy having to think of something!" —but before he had done speaking, Captain Burnaby had jumped on to the stone.

"While you have been thinking, Miss Anstruther, I have wished!" he exclaimed, triumphantly.

"What a cruel thing to do!" she said, turning hastily round, "and I had just thought of something I wanted so much!"

"Too late now," he replied—"that is to say, if the fairies really listen to the first comers."

They were all standing on the stone by this time.

"Let us now tell our wishes," suggested Colonel Kingscote. "You begin, Burnaby, as you were the first."

"No, certainly not; for of course if we did, we should gain nothing. It would never do."

"Certainly not," assented both Genie and Miss Burnaby, readily.

"Well, I disagree with you all," said Miss Molly. "I, for one, have always found that it is much better to mention one's wishes; they are generally so much more likely to be attended to. But you three," with a wave of her hand towards those who had spoken, "are evidently ashamed of your thoughts. In that case, I am afraid the fairies will not have much mercy on you. I, now, have no hesitation in saying that I wished I might not be upset in the dogcart going home—for if there's one thing I am more frightened of than another——"

"How can you," interrupted Captain Burnaby, "throw such aspersions on my driving!"

"Do you judge from what you saw while coming?" asked Colonel Kingscote. "Did Captain Burnaby neglect the horse for you?"

"It was better than its being the other way, though," put in his sister.

"Yes, certainly," acquiesced Molly; "only in the dark, of course, that might be attended with danger; so I thought it best to be on the safe side, and

make as much use of my wish as was in my power."

There was a general laugh at Molly's caution as they left the haunted spot.

"What do you say," said Colonel Kingscote, "to a cup of tea at the farmhouse, after we have done the ruins, as a preparation for our return home?" This was agreed to; and after they had wandered about and examined everything to the general satisfaction, they directed their footsteps towards the farmhouse.

"What was that, Miss Burnaby?" questioned Colonel Kingscote, who had joined Winifred and Genie, who were walking together. "I feel interested in the beginning of that speech, now I have heard the end."

"It was nothing of very much importance. Genie was telling me of a girl whom, curiously enough, we both knew, but of whom I have lost sight for many years. It appears she was engaged, and had been for some time, to a man who, at the very last moment, left her and married some one else. Genie was telling me this; and I said that if I had been Isabel Craven, I should scarcely even have regretted him."

"I wondered," said Colonel Kingscote, "whom the stern remarks you were making alluded to, and

that was what made me ask the subject of your argument.

"Oh, Genie said that she did not believe any amount of wrong-doing in any one you really loved would alter your affection for them, and I——"

"Well, and you?"

"I? I totally disagreed. I say that if any one, however dearly I might love him, were to do anything that would make me ashamed of him, the disgrace would cancel the affection." And as Colonel Kingscote looked at the determined mouth, for a minute it flashed across him what a dangerous enemy Winifred Burnaby might be.

"And you, Colonel Kingscote, what do you say?"

"I agree with Miss Genie; and I think, therefore, that the saddest part of wrong-doing is, that as we cannot kill our friend's affection for us all at once, so we cause them to suffer even more misery than we do ourselves. I judge by myself; and I think it would give me as much sorrow as I have ever known to hear one I loved blamed by the world, and not be able to deny that the blame was just."

"But if you were deceived," said Winifred, raising her dark eyes earnestly to his. "But if

you were deceived — if the wrong was against yourself?"

"Well, I hope I should try to remember that a day of sin is often followed by a lifetime of repentance." And Genie, who was listening intently, thought, as she looked at his truthful, tender eyes, that he was one of those whose deeds would follow his words.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WILFUL WOMAN.

Chateau qui parle, est près de se rendre.

THE tea at the farmhouse proved as delicious as had been foretold, and in consequence was prolonged till the short winter twilight had begun to settle in, when Colonel Kingscote, jumping up, declared it was quite time they started. The dog-cart was ready first.

"You will be home long before us," called out Colonel Kingscote. "Keep my mother's spirits up, and tell her we are on our way."

"All right."

Directly they were out of sight, Miss Molly turned to Captain Burnaby, and said, in her most coaxing tones—

"Do let me drive!"

"Certainly you may, as long as it is light; but take care—don't upset us. Remember your gloomy

prognostications on the Giant's Rock; it may be you who are going to fulfil them."

"Ah, but remember my wish!"

"Don't imagine *you* will gain your wish—mine came first. So take care," he repeated, as he put the reins into her hand.

"Are you afraid?" she said, with a laugh.

"Yes," he replied; "but not of being upset."

There was silence after that, then he spoke again.

"What is your real name, Miss Anstruther; for I conclude you were not christened Miss Molly?"

"My real name is Marie-Eugenie."

"I thought that was your sister's."

"No; she is only Eugenie. We were both called after our grandmother."

"No wonder you struck out such a remarkable appellation for yourself. Fancy giving two sisters, and twins too, the same name! It is as bad as a man calling *all* his children, boys and girls—eleven of them—'Smith,' as I once heard of some one doing, in honour of his grandfather, who bore that remarkable name, and was a cutler, and was knighted!"

Molly laughed.

"Now, Captain Burnaby, are you sure you did not make that up?"

"That is just the sort of question Winifred

would have asked. I did hope you would have put more faith in me."

"She knows you better, you see."

"Now Miss Anstruther," he exclaimed, starting up, "I will take the reins away from you if you say unkind things. So, as you are completely in my power, I bid you be warned. Do you mind my smoking?"

"Not in the least. To the right or left?" asked Molly; "I declare I have forgotten the way we came."

"Right," answered Captain Burnaby, without looking up from his cigar, which he was engaged in lighting.

"Now that shows I have no bump of locality, for I should have said to the left."

"It is a good thing then, Miss Anstruther, you were not alone."

Very pleasant could Miss Molly make herself on occasions, and evidently this was one on which she was so inclined. Captain Burnaby, too, did his very best, which was saying a good deal, to make the time pass agreeably. Darker and darker grew the evening; and at last, amused and interested as she was, Molly began to be aware that it was getting very late.

"Will you drive now, please?" she said at length; "it is really too dark to see anything. I

had no idea, when we came this afternoon, the road was so long."

"Are you tired?" he said, taking the reins from her; and then, with a little laugh, "I don't think it is the same road; do you?"

"Captain Burnaby!" she exclaimed in a frightened voice, "I believe you told me the wrong way on purpose."

He made no answer.

"What did you do it for," she said, angrily, "when we were late as it was? How could you?"

"I really did not know it was such a long way round. I thought it would have brought us home about the same time as the others. Indeed I did. And you see it was worth something, was it not?"

"Nothing at all," said Miss Molly, coldly. "I am very much annoyed;" but she gave a little shiver as she turned her face away from his eager questioning eyes to the moon, that had now risen, and was sailing in the broad sky above them.

"You are cold," he said. "Stay, wait a minute! There is a coat of mine somewhere, if I can get at it. It was very careless of me letting you drive so long."

In spite of Miss Molly's protestations that she was quite comfortable, he got out the coat and wrapped her in it. "You must let me," he said, penitently; "for I feel it to be a sort of make-up

for the way I have given myself an hour's extra pleasure at your expense."

Miss Molly made no reply to this. Perhaps she had nothing to say; and perhaps—who knows?—she did not disagree with him as much as she tried to make him believe.

A quarter of an hour afterwards they drove up to the door of Eversleigh Hall. Very guilty did Miss Molly feel as they opened the dining-room door, where the others were already seated at dinner.

"Well," exclaimed Colonel Kingscote, "home at last! We had begun to think of sending David and James out to drag the ponds for you, till Miss Burnaby kindly told us, that from a long study of your character she felt certain that if you had really wanted help, you would have let us know; and she being your sister, we abided by her decree. But where have you been?"

"We lost our way," returned Captain Burnaby; "took the wrong turning."

"Well, I *am* surprised at that," remarked Colonel Kingscote; "for I thought you knew every road in the neighbourhood."

"It does not matter explaining now, as you are all right," said Mrs Kingscote, "for you must be starving. Don't trouble to dress, Molly darling; only just go and take off your hat, and then you

can tell us all about it afterwards,"—and nothing loath, Molly obeyed. Poor girl! she had never sinned more innocently.

That evening, as she and her sister were going to bed, Genie suddenly spoke—

"Molly, I advise you to take care."

"Take care of what?" said Molly, defiantly.

"Take care, or you will be letting Captain Burnaby fall in love with you; or"—after a little pause—"falling in love with him yourself."

For all answer to Genie's sorrow and surprise, Molly burst into tears.

"Molly! dear Molly! what have I done?" But she made no reply.

And this is how Genie's second warning was taken.

The next evening was the eventful one on which there were to be the *tableaux vivants*. There was to be a concert first; and it had been suggested that afterwards, as there were a good many people expected, there should be a little dancing.

There had been a great deal of questioning as to what pictures should be represented; and at last, after much argument, the never-wearying "Huguenots" had been decided on. Mrs Kingscote, who was an adept at private theatricals of any sort, had taken great pains in the arrangement of two frames, so that the "Huguenots," and its corresponding

picture the "Black Brunswicker," could be put on the stage at the same time.

And now, behold, it is late in the afternoon, and the performers are assembled for one last rehearsal —all, that is to say, with the exception of Molly.

"Where is Miss Anstruther?" said Colonel Kingscote; his usual quietness had quite succumbed under the excitement prevailing around him.

"I will fetch her," said Genie; "she is writing home, I think, to say what time they are to send the carriage for us to-morrow."

"Oh, don't talk of going now; let us think of something pleasanter while we can. But go and look for her, please; for we must have one more rehearsal."

Genie went. She opened the drawing-room door, and there was Miss Molly, with her pen in her hand, certainly, and a sheet of paper before her, but her letter had not as yet made much progress. Directly Genie entered, however, she began writing assiduously.

"Come, Molly, there is plenty of time before the post goes out, and you are wanted for the 'Huguenots.'"

"I really cannot, Genie. If I don't finish my letter now, I never shall; and besides, I hate rehearsing."

"Never mind how much you hate it," called back Genie, who was already half-way down-stairs again, "but come directly, and don't be lazy."

Genie was not quite easy in her mind about her sister. She had not been like herself to-day —quieter than she had ever known her; and sometimes a half thought came over her that it might be the separation on the morrow she was dreading. But she put the thought away from her directly. Molly so fond of any one as to cause her a day's sorrow! The idea was ludicrous.

When she got into the hall, the actors were busy posing themselves for the first *tableau*, which was to be "Choosing the Wedding-Gown," which Colonel Kingscote and Molly were to represent; for the other pictures, Winifred and Colonel Kingscote were to take the "Black Brunswicker," leaving the "Huguenots" to Captain Burnaby and Miss Molly, Genie having declared a decided preference for looking on.

Colonel Kingscote was standing waiting for the sisters; and as Molly entered, which she did immediately after Genie, he called out—

"Come, Miss Anstruther, quick now, and choose your wedding-dress; you have no time to lose."

Miss Burnaby walked down to the lower end of the hall to see how they would strike the spectators, and she declared the effect to be very pretty.

"We must do the others once," she went on, "tired as I am of the sight of them; but I believe it is our duty to go through them again."

"Now, Miss Molly," said Colonel Kingscote, "let me see you and your Huguenot before I attempt to settle myself. I always get right in a minute; don't I, Miss Burnaby? Though I don't quite come up to Burnaby yet, I am sure he might have stood in the position all his life."

Winifred laughed, but Molly drew back and said—

"No, I have changed my mind; I am not going to act. I really cannot," she went on, as Colonel Kingscote was interrupting her. "You all know me; now do you suppose I could stand perfectly still all that time?"

"Oh, but that's nonsense," said Colonel Kingscote; "I have no doubt you will not fidget more than the rest of us."

"Yes, I should. I should only spoil the group. Take Genie, Colonel Kingscote; now she can stand motionless for hours. Think what a recommendation for *tableaux vivants!*" and then turning to Captain Burnaby, who had never spoken during the discussion—"Won't Genie do just as well? We are so alike, you know; it can't make any difference, can it?"

"Not the least, I should think," assented Captain

Burnaby, pleasantly—"that is to say, of course, if you *really* dislike it, and Miss Genie is willing to take your place. There is the advantage," he went on, as Colonel Kingscote was placing Genie's hands in the proper position for untying her Huguenot's knot—"there is the advantage of having a double, to whom you can always depute your disagreeable duties."

Molly never answered; and as to Genie, she saw her sister was thoroughly in earnest, so she did not like to say anything: but certainly Molly was becoming more incomprehensible from day to day; and without another word from any one, Molly returned to her unfinished letter.

The evening performance was a grand success, at least so the many spectators declared. The concert was better than such amateur performances usually are; but then Molly's voice was equal, if not superior, to that of many public singers. At Colonel Kingscote's request, she sang the song that had recalled so many sad memories to him. Genie thought, as she listened to the low sweet voice repeating those words—

> "Sans cesse mon cœur sent,
> Le regret d'un absent"—

there was a ring of something nearer akin to pain in it than she had ever heard before from happy Miss Molly.

After the singing and playing, there came the *tableaux*. No one then could have associated anything of pain with the Vicar of Wakefield's happy daughter choosing her wedding-gown, with a pretty, puzzled expression on her bright face; Colonel Kingscote, as the *fiancé*, looking proudly down at her.

Genie wondered she could ever have thought of anything sad in connection with her.

And then, last of all, those *tableaux* Mrs Kingscote had taken such interest in. The curtain drew up and disclosed those two pictures that tell such a tale of sorrow to the most careless passer-by. Such a tale of a strong man's love and pride struggling for the mastery!

"Why, Molly," said Mrs Kingscote, turning suddenly round; "I thought you were Genie all this time; you used to be the little Huguenot."

"Yes," said Molly, carelessly; "but I could not stand still so long—so I gave up my place to Genie; it makes no difference, for we are so alike."

The curtain fell, but there was a loud "encore," and, obedient to the call, it rose again; and once more Molly, if she so wished, could look at the part in the drama she had resigned.

There was dancing in the evening—dancing in which Captain Burnaby devoted a great deal of his time to his little Huguenot wife.

"What a flirt that man is!" said Genie, innocently, when she and Molly were alone in their own room; "really, to have heard him talking to me to-night, I might, if I had not known better, have imagined I was all in all to him;" and she laughed a low, happy laugh as she spoke. "But no men ever deceive me; they are all the same."

"No, not all the same," responded Miss Molly, promptly, "for as I came down-stairs this evening, I met Colonel Kingscote, who asked, 'Is that you, Genie?' and when I replied, 'No, it is I, Molly,' he said most gravely, 'I beg your pardon, Miss Anstruther.' So you see there are *some* men who are not the same to every one."

Genie, covered with confusion, made no answer; and Molly having so satisfactorily turned the conversation away from all that concerned herself, said no more.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

"Qui m'aime, me suit!"

IMMEDIATELY after lunch the next day, the carriage appeared to take the Anstruthers home.

Mrs Kingscote was loud in her protestations of regret at losing them. "You must come again, dears," she said, kissing them affectionately, as they stood ready shawled preparatory to departing—"you must indeed. Tell your mother that I think she ought to spare me one of you altogether. As Molly says, you are so like that it could make no difference to her."

"Then it will have to be me, Mrs Kingscote, to come here," replied Molly; "for our home would never get on without Genie."

"Well, I shall have to go over and ask your mother what she has to say on that subject."

Colonel Kingscote and Captain Burnaby went

down to the door with them, and saw them safely into the carriage.

"Good-bye, Captain Burnaby," said Molly, pleasantly; "and yet not quite good-bye either, for your sister says she will certainly come over and see us again before she leaves, and you of course will have to bring her—you or Colonel Kingscote," she added.

"Oh, I could not come on such a dubious invitation as that," returned Captain Burnaby; "so I am afraid it will have to be Colonel Kingscote. I never go anywhere I am not most particularly invited."

"Well," said Genie "I most particularly invite you any day, any hour, that may suit you; so you have no further excuse."

"I have none."

"Do you extend the invitation to me, Miss Genie?" said Colonel Kingscote.

"Certainly."

"Then *au revoir*," and the carriage drove off.

When the girls arrived at home, Molly at once ran into the drawing-room, where Lady Anstruther was sitting reading.

"Oh, my sweet mother!" she exclaimed, throwing herself down on the ground beside her, and kissing her fondly—"oh, my sweet mother, it is quite a treat to see any one so lovely!"

"My dear Molly," remonstrated her mother; "at any rate you have returned the same as you went away. We have sadly missed you," turning to the quieter Genie, who had now followed her sister. "I don't know what would become of the house if either of you were to marry."

"There is no reason to alarm ourselves about such terrible possibilities yet," said Molly; "but now tell me how everybody and everything has been going on since we left."

"Nothing has happened here, I think, so you must tell me all your news."

In the midst of the excitement Sir Geoffrey came into the room.

"Oh, dear father," exclaimed Molly, "have not you missed us dreadfully?"

"My dear, as to missing you, it would be impossible to avoid doing so. The house has been *quiet* since you left. Well, and what did you think of these people who were staying at the Hall?"

"The Burnabys? they were perfection. Don't you remember my writing and telling you so? I am sure I wrote *once*. They are going away on Monday, but most likely they will come over before then to say good-bye, so you will have a chance of seeing them."

"And Colonel Kingscote?"

"Oh, delightful!" went on Molly, enthusiastically; "nicer even than 'the young brother officer'—as you remember, mother, I foretold he would be."

"I am sure it is time you girls dressed for dinner," said Sir Geoffrey. "You can tell us the rest afterwards."

The week gradually passed away. Molly was as wild, if not wilder than ever—at least so Genie thought whenever she turned her attention to her. And yet she was puzzled at times, for it did not seem to her altogether it was the same girlish high spirits it used to be; and once she had found her, after an evening spent in amusing Sir Geoffrey and her mother with an account of the *tableaux*, standing in the cold deserted schoolroom, leaning her forehead against the window, in the chill winter moonlight.

"Why, Molly, what is the matter?"

"I have a headache," responded Molly, in a tone that forbade any more questioning, and Genie respected her evident wish for silence. Perhaps in her heart of hearts she half suspected what it was that was on her sister's mind. Captain Burnaby's name was never mentioned between them.

"Saturday at last!" exclaimed Molly as she rose on that day. "I suppose it was the dissipation last week, Genie, but these four days have seemed strangely long."

"I should think the Kingscotes would drive over very likely to-day," replied her sister. "I do hope they will manage it, for I should like to see Winifred again before she leaves—she said something about asking us to go and stay with them in Berkshire. It would be nice, would it not?"

"Most unlikely," replied Miss Molly; her remark, however, was in allusion to the first part of Genie's sentence, as to the probability of the Kingscotes appearing that day,—"most unlikely. It is much more probable they will choose Sunday, as it would be a good excuse for bringing the horses out on that day."

This she said a little bitterly; and Genie feeling snubbed, let the subject drop.

But notwithstanding Molly's determined manner of speaking, the instant lunch was over she ran up to her own room and reappeared wrapped up in a scarlet cloak.

"Where are you off to, Molly?" asked her father, meeting her in the hall.

"I am going out for a long walk," she replied, gaily, "so as to be out of the way in case of visitors."

"Well, take care of yourself, dear."

It was a lovely day; the February sun was bringing out the purple and yellow crocuses, and very bright and pretty they looked. Molly stood

still for a second in the porch debating whither she should direct her steps.

"Not to the poor," she said, with a little shake of her head; "I don't feel good enough for the poor to-day. Why, May, is that you? How you startled me!"

From behind a tall laurustinus a child had crept, —a pretty, brown-eyed girl—one of the "little ones."

"Where are you going, Miss Molly?"

"To the Brook garden," responded her sister.

The child clung to her, and said coaxingly, "Oh, please take me with you—do, darling Miss Molly!"

As Molly stooped down to kiss the little upturned face, she saw through the leaves of the flowering geranium, that covered all the interior of the porch, a drag just turning up the bottom of the drive. Unclasping the child's hands, she darted quick as thought to the door to escape. Then a sudden remembrance of what she had said to May occurred to her, and now there was no chance of her taking her walk anywhere else.

Turning back, she said quickly, "Visitors, May. Oh, how truly horrible! Now I must race down to the Brook garden to get out of their way; but mind you don't tell them where I am. If you don't, I will give you sixpence when I come back."

"All right; run!" cried the child, excitedly; and Molly ran on the wings of the wind, and was out of sight in a minute, but not before a glimpse of her red cloak had been caught by one of the visitors at least. Not by Colonel Kingscote, seated on the box, and at present engaged in bringing his four-in-hand with difficulty up the somewhat narrow drive; nor by old Mrs Kingscote inside, wishing devoutly she was safe back at home, for it was not often she intrusted herself to anybody out driving, except her old coachman, than whom she could not have driven more carefully herself. But the danger was over at length; and Sir Geoffrey, who had seen the drag, was out on the steps to meet them, and to help Mrs Kingscote down. It was rumoured that Sir Geoffrey had, in years long gone by, been one of those who had tried to persuade the pretty young widow of old Cecil Kingscote to change her name. Whether that were true or not, they were always great friends.

"Molly will be so sorry to have missed you," he said, as they entered the drawing-room; "she has been talking all the week of your expected visit, and she has only just this moment gone out. She may be in the garden still. In fact, I should think she very likely is."

"May I go and see whether I can find her?" said Captain Burnaby to Lady Anstruther, to whom he was talking.

"Oh, please do," she replied, "for she will be so annoyed if I do not make an effort to have her found. We will go and put on our hats, and follow you; and in the mean time you will very likely catch her up, if she has really only just gone out."

As Rex opened the door into the passage, he saw running down it at full speed a little girl of about eight years old.

"Here, child!" he called out; "come here, I want to speak to you." May readily came forward.

"Where is your sister Molly?" he asked, in a lower tone.

The child looked up and laughed. "She told me not to tell!"

"Oh, but that's very unkind, because I particularly want to speak to her."

"She promised me sixpence not to tell," repeated the child, dubiously.

"Well now, listen. I will give you two sixpences to show me where she is."

"In the Brook garden," replied May, slowly.

"Which is the way?"

"You must go straight down there," said May, opening the door and pointing down a path that was known by the name of the "Cedar Walk." "You must go through the orchard and——"

"Oh, all right; thanks, pretty one! I shall find my way now; and I won't forget the two sixpences —you shall have them when I come back."

With an amused smile in his dark eyes, Captain Burnaby followed the directions the child had given him.

Before he entered the Cedar Walk, he turned round to take a look at the house he had left. Eversleigh Grange was not nearly such an imposing building as Eversleigh Hall. It looked as if it might once have been an old farmhouse, which indeed was the case; one part of the house still bore traces of its origin, for its beams were painted black and white, as is more particularly the case in some parts of Cheshire. The rest of the Grange was more modern, and had been added to the original house when Sir Geoffrey's ancestor, who fought well for king and country in the terrible days of Charles I., had returned from beyond seas on hearing that the son of his king had come into his own again. But Eversleigh Grange had one charm that few modern houses possess, and that was a most perfect and enchanting garden. A real, old-fashioned English garden, so large that you might lose yourself in it—a garden filled with stately walks bordered by stiff, clipped yew-trees; and in one part a long holly hedge, cut into arches, through which on bright sunny days you could

catch a glimpse of a rose-garden—a holly hedge that was renowned far and wide through the county, and was the delight of Sir Geoffrey's heart.

The Brook garden, whither Captain Burnaby was making his way according to May's instructions, was so called because it was separated from the rest of the garden by a little stream. In summer a perfect place to sit and read or dream in; and even now, in these early February days, a spot where the first violets appeared, so sheltered was the centre of the little island from every cold wind that blew, by the great trees that grew around.

Captain Burnaby crossed the plank that served as bridge to the little island, and directly his foot touched the other side he caught a glimpse of the red cloak he had been so long in search of.

Before she had heard his approaching footstep, or so much as glanced up from the bouquet of early violets she was composing, he was by her side.

"How do you do, Miss Anstruther?"

For a second intense surprise rendered her dumb, and then she replied, "How do you do? But how *did* you find your way down here?"

"Oh, easily enough. But I feel I ought to return you that sixpence you so needlessly expended this afternoon"

"What do you mean?" she said, but reddening a little as she spoke,

"What do I mean?" he repeated. "Nothing more than I say. Only let me give you a word of warning; remember, a person who will take one bribe will generally take another, and—I outbid you."

She had quite recovered herself now, and laughed too. "Well, I will confess," she said; "I do not, as a rule, care for afternoon visitors, and so I thought I would make my escape if it were possible."

"And of course you could not see all that long distance off that it was us, eh?"

No answer—only under his questioning eyes hers sank, and the tell-tale blush mounted once more to her cheek.

"That blush proclaims you guilty," said Captain Burnaby; "but, after all, what matters? Of course the only wrong done is your having been found out; for why should not *we* be run away from as well as any other afternoon callers? Never mind, I forgive you; and I daresay the others will when I lead you back to them."

"Let us be starting, then," replied Miss Molly, "or they will be thinking *you* are lost too."

"First let us finish gathering your bunch of violets," and he stooped down and picked one or

two. "This is my last day, you know, so we must gather them *in memoriam*. You can keep them, and think of them and your favourite song together."

"Well, it is nothing to him," thought Molly, proudly, "and it is certainly nothing to me;" so she laughed and talked over the violet-seeking, which was no easy task, as there were very few to be found.

At last they decided there was not one left, so they started on their homeward journey.

When they arrived at the plank that crossed the stream, Captain Burnaby, who was walking first, turned round with his foot on the bridge towards Miss Molly.

He held out his hand, but she shook her head—"I have crossed this too often to want help, thank you."

"All right," and he made one more step forward, and then turned back again and abruptly said, "Why would you not act with me the other night?"

"Why?" she echoed, opening her large brown eyes to their widest—"why? because I cannot stand still."

"I would have kept you still," he said, with a laugh; "but it was not that, I know. What made you go out when you knew *I* was coming? I

suppose I have annoyed you somehow; what have I done?" And then, after a little pause, "Was it taking you that long way home the other night?"

"Yes," exclaimed Molly, indignantly, "of course it was; to amuse yourself you did that which annoyed me very much, and made every one laugh at me, which is a thing I hate; and it certainly was not my fault."

"No, certainly not. Well the time of amusing myself at your expense is over now, for I go to-morrow, so you can rejoice as much as ever you like. You need not fear to offend me even by saying it to my face; so begin. Repeat after me, 'I am glad to say good-bye.'" But no word came from between Molly's closed lips.

"Say it," he went on, "and I shall consider you have forgiven me, and are willing to take it all as a joke."

But still Molly, who had not taken a step on the bridge yet, hung back, and never spoke.

"Well, are you really too angry still to let us part in peace?"

She lifted her eyes from the ground then. If he was in the humour to joke, so would she, and she raised them to his face. But she had not realised what the mist was that was spreading between her and everything else, or she would never have risked that. For although she looked

up bravely enough, she felt, directly she had done so, that her eyes were dimmed with unshed tears, and she dared not speak for fear one should fall and disgrace her for life.

These were her thoughts and fears; but as she looked up with that saddened look in her brown eyes that Rex Burnaby had certainly never imagined they could wear, the piece of the plank that separated them was recrossed, and he stood by her side.

"Molly darling!" he exclaimed, "did you really think I was going to leave *you* behind?" And he stooped down and pressed a kiss on the red lips, just as she raised her hand to brush away the tears that she felt were filling her eyes, and that had at last passed beyond her power of hiding.

She was crying fast now, as she stood with one arm resting on the wooden hand-rail of the bridge and her face hidden in the folds of her scarlet cloak: but somehow Rex managed to soothe the troubled weeping, and to bring the smiles back at length; and that accomplished, Molly declared it was time they returned to the house.

Genie, standing talking to Miss Burnaby on the lawn, seeing them coming slowly over the meadow at the foot of the garden, with the red glow of the afternoon sun full upon them, felt that Molly's troubles were satisfactorily concluded.

Before they had joined the two girls, the Kingscotes reappeared from the hothouses, where they had been admiring Sir Geoffrey's camellias.

"Oh, here you all are!" exclaimed Colonel Kingscote; and then turning to Captain Burnaby and his companion—

"How do you do, Miss Anstruther? I am very glad Burnaby found you. Do you know I thought he would! But we have met," he went on, "only to say good-bye; for there is the carriage."

"Good-bye," said Miss Burnaby, affectionately; "you must come and stay with us. You will let them, Lady Anstruther, will you not? for I am so very much alone, and it would be such a pleasure to me!"

"Certainly," replied Lady Anstruther, who had heard all Winifred's story from Genie, and was prepared to love her almost as much as did her daughter.

And then there was a general move to the drag, in the midst of which Captain Burnaby found time to say in a low voice to Molly, "Don't be surprised if you see me back to-morrow; I have a kind of presentiment I shall not leave for two or three days yet. But it all depends on you, you know."

"On me!" repeated Molly.

"Yes, on how you persuade your father to think

of me; for I know you can persuade him to anything. So I shall come to-morrow to see what account you have given of me;" and then the coach was reached, and Rex had to go forward to assist his sister up into her exalted position.

"What lovely violets!" she said; for Captain Burnaby was still holding all the spoils of the Brook garden.

"That reminds me," replied her brother, "that they don't belong to me at all;" and once more he stepped back to Molly's side.

"May I divide them?" he said; "because you know I did pick the largest share."

Molly nodded.

"Now, Burnaby," called out Colonel Kingscote, "I cannot hold these horses any longer; do be quick!"

"Yes, in one instant. I really must first divide these honourably with their owner. There, Miss Molly," in a low voice, "keep those in memory of the Brook garden, and the peace made there; and for the future, never look at them without thinking of the absent."

Molly blushed crimson. "*Le regret d'un absent,*" she repeated softly, as Captain Burnaby turned away to mount on to his seat.

No one was near enough to attend to these last words except Genie, who charitably walked round

to the other side of the drag and entered into an interesting conversation with Colonel Kingscote on the merits of his four horses, which prevented him remembering he was being kept waiting; and when he at last turned round to look for the culprit, he was seated by his side. Then with one last farewell they were gone.

For a few minutes Molly stood watching the retreating coach, till it was lost in a turn of the drive, and then with a happy sigh she looked round for her sister.

"Well?" said Genie, questioningly. But Molly shook her head.

"No one before the mother!" she exclaimed, as she ran into the house—into the drawing-room first, but she was not there. At last, in the schoolroom, empty in consequence of the Saturday half-holiday, she found her, to whom Miss Molly had come in every grief or joy since she could remember; and there, in the deserted room, where she had first felt the shadow of a possible trouble hanging over her, on her knees, with her face hidden in her mother's dress, she whispered the story that had been told her that day.

When it was over, her mother kissed her fondly. "As long as you are happy, darling, *I* have nothing to say. I should think your father would be pleased too. It is only losing you, Molly dear,

that I cannot bear to look forward to; but I suppose *that* would have had to have come some day; and if you are happy," she repeated—and here, to her mother's surprise, Miss Molly burst into tears.

"It is nothing," she said—"really nothing; only I am tired, I think;" and so her mother, after a fond kiss, gave her up to Genie's care, who had just entered the room. And to Genie, in her own room, Molly confided the hopes and fears of the last week; and Genie, in her soft, sympathising way, listened to her story, and said—

"Why, darling, did you not tell me you were in trouble? How often I must have teased you unintentionally!"

"What!" exclaimed Molly, starting up; "do you think I would have confessed even to *you* that I loved any man too much for my own peace, and that he did not care in the least for me. I must be very weak now to allow it even." And at that Genie desisted from any further questions.

CHAPTER X.

SWEET IS TRUE LOVE.

" A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles."
—WORDSWORTH.

SURELY they who cannot enjoy the morning sun for wondering whether it will set amid storms and tempests, and they who dare not contemplate the glorious dawn for thinking how soon the evening shades may fall, are sadly mistaken; rather let us gather fresh courage in the sunny spring-time for the dreary winter that must come sooner or later. As we grow older, we see that those brief, bright pauses in life generally come before a storm; then surely we may consider that they are sent in mercy.

Miss Molly did not stop to consider all this, nor to wonder whether any storm was likely to follow this great happiness that had come to her; but

nevertheless she took every day with grateful thanks as it came, and rejoiced in it. Captain Burnaby had fulfilled his own prophecy, and had stayed on two or three days more at the Hall; and then he had, at Sir Geoffrey's invitation, spent a week at the Grange, where he had first been welcomed and loved for Molly's sake, and then for his own. And now he had returned to the Kingscotes, and it had been arranged that on this his last day he should drive Molly over to dine and sleep at Eversleigh Hall; and from there, the next morning, he was to return to his own home in Berkshire for the few remaining days of his leave, before rejoining his regiment at Hounslow. But their separation was not to be for long, for Winifred had written a loving little note begging Lady Anstruther to let the two girls go and stay with her for a fortnight directly her father, who was at present abroad, should return home; and Lady Anstruther had willingly consented. And so, behold Miss Molly and Captain Burnaby once more in Colonel Kingscote's dogcart, that had been the cause of their quarrel and reconciliation, on their way to Eversleigh Hall.

Molly was rather subdued at the prospect of the morrow, though the parting was such a different one to what she had feared it might be. She was not half such an amusing companion, Rex told her,

as she had been on the occasion of their last drive; and then he went on—

"Perhaps you want to drive; is that it?"

"Yes, that is it," said Molly, rousing herself; "please give me the reins."

But even that did not bring back her powers of speech, and they were both rather silent till they arrived at the place where the two roads met.

"Well, which road shall it be to-night?" asked Rex, in a laughing voice.

For all answer, Molly turned the horse's head down the lane which had given rise to so many angry feelings that other night.

"Good child!" remarked Rex, approvingly; and he leant down and kissed her cheek — a kiss which the short winter twilight hid from any one, if there had been any one to see it, which there was not.

"What a mean advantage to take," exclaimed Molly, "when my hands are full, and I cannot defend myself!"

Her words recalled to her mind that other occasion, not so very long ago, in the Hall drawing-room, when she had made use of nearly the same; and she reddened a little as she spoke, under cover of the shades of evening.

"I think, Captain Burnaby," she said, suddenly, "we will not make any confessions of our past lives

to each other. It is much better to start fair, and to let 'bygones be bygones.'"

"I quite agree with you," replied Captain Burnaby, emphatically; "we can trust each other for the future; and for the past—for *your* sake, I will make no inquiries. And that reminds me"—but whether it was his words, or the kiss that had preceded them, he did not say—"that I have something for you." So saying, he took from his pocket a small ring.

"Give me the reins a minute," he whispered, "and take off your glove."

Molly obeyed, and Rex placed her engagement-ring on her finger.

"Opals," she said, with a little shiver, and then a laugh at her own superstition; "how dreadfully unlucky!"

"Nonsense! what are you afraid of? surely not of me?"

"Yes, I am," she replied, gravely; "but it is a good thing, for I never could have cared for anybody who had not frightened me into it."

After that, the horse had everything much its own way; for as Captain Burnaby had one arm around Miss Molly, he had not much time to devote to it—so it wandered about the road in a way that Molly said would disgrace them if any one were to

try and track them by their wheel-marks. But after all, who can blame them?

> "It was the time of roses,
> And they plucked them as they passed."

Directly dinner was over, Colonel Kingscote retired charitably to the smoking-room, where he asked Captain Burnaby to join him later—"When they are tired of you in the drawing-room," he remarked; and as Mrs Kingscote invariably fell asleep of an evening, they were able to converse upon the subjects that pleased themselves. Genie was wont to declare at home that they were model lovers, at any rate in public, for that they were not so engrossed with one another but that they could make themselves agreeable to those about them. Perhaps that was the reason that Captain Burnaby had won so upon Sir Geoffrey, for he had been used to say that he had had to give up going into society on account of the many pairs of lovers it had been his misfortune to meet; and he had always threatened that should his own daughters ever be afflicted with a sweetheart, he should get a friend to take them in till they were married. And so it was to his great relief that he found Rex Burnaby was a man after his own mind, who never troubled him by being demonstrative in his affection before him. Genie and her mother used to laugh too in

private over Miss Molly, whose boast it had been that she was incapable of caring for any one—Molly, who had laughed so merrily over any one she saw pining secretly for, or rejoicing openly in any man's kind glances; to see her so thoroughly and heartily in love, obeying Rex Burnaby's slightest whims and caprices, amused her mother and sister very much.

But that evening was the last she was to see him for a good four or five weeks at least, for he did not expect to be able to get leave again for some time; he was not going to try for it till his father returned home, when he was to join them all in Berkshire. And that evening being the last, Mrs Kingscote conceived that it was only fair she should sleep—and sleep she did, almost uninterruptedly, till the clock struck eleven, when she rose up and said she was sure it was time Molly went to bed; "And as to you, Captain Burnaby, if you are going to smoke, you *must* go now, or you will be up all night making up for lost time." They went down to the smoking-room together, where Colonel Kingscote rose, 'Times' in hand, to welcome them.

"At last," he said; "better late than never. I had no idea, when I let you off coming with me immediately, you would have the heart to let me spend my whole evening alone."

"Oh, I am so sorry! Colonel Kingscote," exclaimed Molly—"I am really. Let us stay down here and make amends now; I am not a bit tired."

"No, of course not," he replied; "but I could not permit such a doubtful compliment to *my* powers of amusing you; and I am sure it is high time you were in bed—you will only just get your beauty sleep as it is."

"Good night, then, Colonel Kingscote, if you won't let me stay."

"Good night, my dear," he replied, "if Burnaby will allow me to say so. I am very glad that you are to become one of 'Ours';" and then he turned to speak to his mother, while Miss Molly went up to receive Rex Burnaby's good-night kiss, which was the only demonstration of affection that she ever allowed in public.

"Good night, Captain Burnaby."

"Good night and good-bye," he replied, "for I shall be gone before you are up to-morrow morning."

"Nonsense!"

"Not nonsense at all, but very good sense. You must not think of it; it is far too early."

Still Molly looked questioningly at him, but he shook his head decidedly.

"Certainly not," he repeated. And Molly, who felt she had found her master, and that it was always useless arguing against him when he had

once made up his mind, with a sigh resigned herself to her fate.

"Well," said Colonel Kingscote, as he opened the door for her, "to-morrow night, great suns being gone, perhaps little stars will be appreciated; so I will reserve all my efforts till then."

Molly made no answer beyond a rather sad smile, as she and Mrs Kingscote went out.

"Molly, dear child," said Mrs Kingscote, "come into my room, and warm yourself at my fire before going to bed, and tell me all about it. You owe all your thanks to me, do you not?"

"Yes, dear Mrs Kingscote; indeed it seems to me just now that I owe *the* happiness of my life to you. But I daresay," she broke off, "when we are quarrelling like cat and dog I shall say something very different."

Certainly it was beyond Miss Molly's powers to be sentimental for long together.

"Yes, I daresay; but that is such a long time to look forward to, at least let us hope so. Do you know," went on Mrs Kingscote, "that not so very long ago I hoped you would have been a daughter to me, Molly."

Molly blushed crimson, but her ready wit rarely deserted her.

"I have a double, remember, Mrs Kingscote, who fitted in very conveniently for the *tableaux!*"

Mrs Kingscote looked up and laughed. "Oh, Molly, you are incorrigible," she said. "Well, I suppose, my dear," after a little pause, "you must go to bed now; and so must I, though for your sake I have used up all the sleep that was meant to last me during the night in a most uncomfortable way in a chair; but never mind—it was in a good cause."

"After hearing that," said Molly, with dignity, "I shall indeed go."

"But stay, Molly child, for one minute; just tell me this—is he or his brother the eldest?"

"Oh, his brother!"

"Is he married?"

"Who? Rex? I hope not."

"No, Arthur."

"Yes, I believe he is. But I have never heard, now I come to think of it; but I will ask." And then Mrs Kingscote let her go.

The morrow's breakfast was not a very lively affair, though Colonel Kingscote made himself very pleasant, which, indeed, was not difficult for him to do.

"I saw Rex off, Miss Anstruther, and he sent you his love," he said, on rising to shake hands with her.

"Thank you for honestly giving his message," she replied. "When are you yourself going to Hounslow?"

"This day week," he replied.

As the meal progressed, Miss Molly's spirits, which rarely deserted her for long, gradually returned, and she and Colonel Kingscote were soon talking and laughing as merrily as if Rex Burnaby had never come, and seen, and conquered.

"I am glad to hear, Miss Anstruther," at last he said, "that you have decided on staying here a day or two. Don't you think we could persuade your mother to spare your sister again also?"

"You can go and try," returned Molly, "but I fear not; and I am afraid it will only be till to-morrow for me, for I am sure I must be wanted at home."

"Well, I shall go over to Eversleigh Grange this afternoon on the chance; so have you any message for any one?"

"None that I can think of at present, thank you; but I daresay a great many will come into my head before you start."

"Ah!" said Colonel Kingscote, suddenly turning towards his mother, "I think we shall have war before the year is out."

"War!" repeated his mother in frightened tones. "Oh, Cecil, I hope not!" and then, after a moment's pause, "You must really see about selling out; you know you have promised me for so long that you

would settle down at home—it really is time I had some one here to look after me."

Colonel Kingscote laughed as he got up, and stooping, kissed his mother.

"You are evidently not of Spartan blood, mother mine," he said, gently.

Cecil Kingscote was ever gentle with women, and, above all, with his mother; he never laughed at her little tender speeches to him, and attempts at taking care of him. "You are evidently not of Spartan blood; but even you, I think, would not like me to leave the army at the first whisper of war."

"Yes, I should," returned Mrs Kingscote, "most certainly. The army is the last place I should like you to be in in time of war. We can afford to laugh at it," she went on, "for I should think it is very far off." This she said with a proud look at her tall, handsome son, that showed she would be the last of the mothers who would keep back their boys when England called for them.

Just as Colonel Kingscote was starting that afternoon, he opened the drawing-room door, where Molly was seated reading over the fire, looking rather sadder than was her wont, to ask her if she had thought of anything she wanted from her own home.

"No," said Molly; "only try and persuade Genie to come."

"By the by," he said, opening the door again, after he had closed it, "I always forgot to ask you if you and Burnaby ever made it up about the 'Huguenots'?"

"Now, Colonel Kingscote," said Molly, rising with dignity, "I will not allow any remarks to be made to me on that subject."

"Well, I withdraw my remark; I made it out of pure kindness. I am only sorry we cannot have them over again. Perhaps he might be more successful in his request that you would act with him *now*."

"Hush," said Molly, warningly, holding up her finger; "I am beginning to get angry."

"I am not frightened; and the more angry you get, the worse I shall become. Do you remember the day you lost your way?"

He said no more, but ran down-stairs, not, however, before Molly had flown after him. But he was first, and had opened the front door and mounted into his dogcart before Molly had reached it; then he turned round triumphantly to see her standing flushed and excited on the steps.

"Wait," she cried, breathlessly. "Indeed——" but he shook his head.

"I am sorry," he called back, as he drove off—

"very sorry, but I cannot hear you; you must explain it to me to-night." And Molly had indignantly to return indoors, leaving Colonel Kingscote well satisfied with his successful method of rousing her.

But she was too much roused now to return to her book and tranquillity; and so she determined, instead, to put on her hat and take a brisk walk in the garden, from which she returned an hour later, the roses once more blooming on her cheeks, much to Colonel Kingscote's delight when he came back from his useless mission, as nothing would persuade the Anstruthers to spare Genie again. "And as to Molly," said Genie confidentially to Colonel Kingscote, "tell her she must come back to-morrow, for I really cannot get on without her. Whatever I shall do when she is married I cannot think."

"Perhaps you will be married yourself before then," returned Colonel Kingscote, hopefully; "it never does to look so far into the future."

And Genie, with a heightened colour, wished him good-bye, and told him to be sure and give her message to Molly, as she looked to realities, and had no time even to imagine possibilities.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

Give her time, on grass and sky
  Let her gaze if she be fain:
As they look ere *he* drew nigh
  They will never look again.
Ah! the playtime she has known
  While her goldilocks grew long,
Is it like a nestling flown—
  Childhood over like a song?

THE three weeks passed away at length, but not before Molly had begun to fear time was at a standstill, and Genie had declared many times that she was being worn to a thread-paper from Molly's incapacity for sitting still a moment, which infirmity was becoming worse day by day. But at last, one bright March morning, Molly, who had, contrary to her usual custom, contrived to be downstairs sooner than any one else, and thus had secured to herself the privilege of opening the post-bag, found, on tumbling the letters out in reckless confusion, that three had fallen to her share; and

with them she seated herself in the deep embrasure of one of the windows, to read them in peace before any one else came down.

The first she opened was written in a somewhat stiff, old-fashioned handwriting, and ran as follows:

"ASTON MANOR.

"MY DEAR MARY,—For I presume I may call you so,—I have only just returned from abroad, where I have been with my son Arthur for the last two months, and have consequently only just heard the news. You must ask your mother to let you come and stay with us for a little while, so that I may learn to know you. We will try to make you happy while you are with us; and I dare-say Reginald, who will be at home, will not leave you long to the care of a tiresome old invalid. I think you and I must get on well together—I am sure I hope so, my dear; your name is in itself a great recommendation to me, for it was that of my dear, dead wife. I can wish you nothing more than that you may be like her. Until we meet, believe me yours very truly,

"ARTHUR BURNABY."

Molly put it down, and took up the next.

"DEAREST MOLLY,—My father has written to

you, begging you to come and stay with us. I hope you and Genie will both be able to do so. Reginald and Arthur will be at home, so you will be able to make acquaintance with those of our family whom you do not know. If you can manage it, I should like you to come on Monday 22d.—Your affectionate WINIFRED BURNABY."

That read, Molly threw it on one side, and took up Rex's note.

"HOUNSLOW.

"DEAR MISS MOLLY,—Now mind you let nothing stand in the way of you and Genie going to Aston Manor next week. I have got a week's leave, and shall be at home myself on Monday. If you have not arrived, I shall punish *you* by returning here early on Tuesday morning, so that you will be left all alone to the tender mercies of my father, who is very difficult for strangers to get on with, as only his own family can understand what he says: so beware. The colonel, whom you ask after in a strangely affectionate manner, is well and cheerful, which is more than I can say of myself, as I am being nearly worried to death by one of our captains, who is about the greatest cad I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. We have already had to be separated by mutual friends twice. Let him

beware the third time, it is proverbially fatal! His name is White—euphonious and uncommon, is it not? I tell you, so that if ever you should meet any one of the same name you may avoid him, for fear he should be a relation of his, and at all like him. I will tell you more about him when we meet. He is generally supposed to have been in Pollaky's private inquiry office at one time of his life—he is so unpleasantly up in every one's affairs—and is in consequence known amongst men by the *sobriquet* of 'The Detective.' I can think of nothing more to say just now. Ever your loving REX."

It was late on the afternoon of the 22d that Genie and Molly arrived at Reading. It was a long drive from there to Aston Manor, they knew; and Genie looked round for Winifred, who had promised to meet them; but there was no sign of her. While they were wondering if they had made any mistake in the train they were to come by, a footman came up and said that Miss Burnaby had been unable to leave Sir Arthur, but she had sent the carriage, so she hoped they would be quite comfortable.

Genie was very quiet all the way, and even Molly was more silent than usual at the moment that they were driving up to the door.

The principal thing that struck her was the

neglected look of everything. The Manor itself was a great house built round a square, paved court, and around it was a moat.

On first looking at it, one always expected to see a drawbridge, and a portcullis, and knights in armour riding through the great stone archway; but despite its worn, aged look, standing, as it were, a stern reminder of the past amid the green trees of Berkshire—or rather because of that look—the Burnabys would not have exchanged their old, dilapidated hall for any modern castle in the three kingdoms.

The sisters were shown into a drawing-room, where, after a few minutes, they were joined by Winifred.

"I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed, as she kissed them, "and so sorry that I could not be spared to go and meet you; but my father is so very far from well that I did not like to leave him."

"What is the matter with him?" asked Genie.

"I don't really know. He is very old, you know, and not at all strong. I think he has found the climate of England rather trying after his two months spent in Nice. But now tell me about yourselves, what you have been doing. And let me tell you once more how very glad I am to see you here. We are almost sisters now, are we not? I never had a sister."

"I always thought," said Molly, rather irrelevantly, "till I heard from you the other day, that Arthur was married."

"Oh no," replied Winifred; "I wish he were! But not half so fervently as my father does. I believe nothing would rejoice him so much; but perhaps," she added, "he may be led to follow Rex's good example: example, you know, goes much further than precept."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Arthur Burnaby, the object of Winifred's remarks.

It was in vain that Molly looked at him eagerly to try and discover any likeness between him and Rex. He was a very tall man, but there began and ended every shade of resemblance.

He had a saddened, worn look, that gave him the appearance of having many more than the five years of seniority that he possessed. His eyes were dark blue—beautiful eyes—but they had a restless look in them, as though they were always expecting some evil. Those who knew him, said of him that Arthur Burnaby looked like a man conscience-stricken, and that if he feared not the past, appearances were against him. But there was one who thought no evil of him—one with whom he was undoubtedly the favourite, and always had been—and that was his father. A great deal of his partiality was accounted for in the

fact that Arthur was the very image of his dead mother. It was from her that he had inherited the blue eyes and fair hair; but it was not the dead mother in her free and happy girlhood he was like, but after she had known the trouble and toils of a lifetime.

Mr Burnaby sat down by Molly and talked to her, and gradually his soft voice and winning manners made her feel quite at home.

There was something about Arthur Burnaby that made its way with strangers, who generally declared he was much easier to get on with than his brother; but in the end they always came round to Rex, complaining they never could get any further with Arthur, after having known him years, than they had done the first day.

"Rex will be here this evening," remarked Arthur, "by the 9.20 train. I shall drive to the station and meet him. But, Winifred," turning to his sister suddenly, "had not Miss Anstruther better go up and see father? He will be expecting it, will he not?"

"I will go and see."

In a few moments she returned. "Come, Molly, my father would like to make acquaintance with you before dinner," and Molly obediently rose and followed her.

They had gone up one flight of stairs when

Molly suddenly stopped short. Winifred looked round inquiringly.

"What is the matter?"

"I really cannot go any further, I am too frightened."

"Frightened! What of?"

"That your father will not like me."

"My dear child," said Winifred, "what are you thinking of? Why, he loves you already from hearsay only. What will he do when he sees you?"

"Hate me, I should think," replied Molly. "Of course *you* cannot sympathise with my fears—I cannot expect you to; but to me it is a terrible moment."

"Well, you had better not stop to think about it any more," said Winifred, laughing as she turned the handle of a door in front of her. "Here, father," she said, taking Molly's hand, "is Mary Anstruther."

An old man rose up from his chair by the fire on hearing Winifred's voice—an old man who, but for his white hairs, might have been Rex himself.

Molly felt all her fears vanish in an instant.

"Come here, my dear;" and as she obeyed, Winifred went out, closing the door softly behind her, leaving Molly alone with her future father-in-law. "Let me take one good look at you," he went on,

taking her two hands in his. "Well," after a second's pause, "I don't think Rex did you more than justice;" and then they sat down, and Miss Molly, who rarely found it impossible to talk to any one, amused and interested old Sir Arthur so, with accounts of her home life, that they were both surprised when Genie knocked at the door and told her it was time to dress for dinner.

Directly Winifred had shown the sisters to their rooms, she returned to her father to ask him what he thought of the bride-elect.

"A very nice, sweet girl," was his answer, "and very pretty too. The only mistake is, that it should have been Arthur. Oh, Winifred, if he would only marry, it would please me so!"

"Perhaps, father, Molly would not agree with you in that, even if she had known Arthur first."

"You are just like all the rest of your sex, Winifred, and are ready to put that good-for-nothing scamp Rex before Arthur; but—I can only pity you. You are always so entirely led by appearances."

"No, indeed, father," began Winifred, but Sir Arthur cut her short.

"I have no time for arguments now; go down and send me up my dinner, and we will finish the discussion another day."

Captain Burnaby was not expected till very late.

When at last he did appear, Molly was not in the drawing-room, she having gone up-stairs to fetch her work. She was coming slowly down again, embroidery in hand, when she heard his voice in the hall. He was speaking to Arthur, and more seriously than was his wont. The two brothers were standing on the stairs, and so engrossed were they in their subject that they neither of them noticed Molly's footstep as she descended.

"It is very foolish," she heard Captain Burnaby say; "you had far better tell father. You know you can do anything you like with him."

"Oh, not yet," broke in Arthur's pleading voice—"not yet, Rex; my father is so ill, it would shorten his life, I do believe."

"Well, Arthur, I do not pretend to judge for you: all I can say is, that I am sure it would be better if you told him than that he should find it out by chance, which he will do one of these days."

"Oh, Rex, he would never forgive me—you know he never would any one who had deceived him; and I could not bear that: and there is Winifred too," and Arthur groaned aloud.

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Rex, kindly; "remember I am putting the worst before you. He might never find it out; and as for me—it is not my place to praise or blame."

Arthur was just going to answer, when the

rustle of a silk dress made him look up and see Miss Molly. With a warning glance at his brother, he opened the drawing-room door and went in, leaving the two outside together.

"Molly," exclaimed Rex, anxiously, "you here!" and he held out his hand; and then his brow smoothed, and he kissed her fondly.

"Did you hear what Arthur and I were saying, dear?"

Molly drew herself away from him, and looked up in his face.

"Not much, Captain Burnaby—only enough," she said, deprecatingly, "to know there is a secret."

Rex laid his hand on her lips. "Well, all I can tell my future wife is, that no one else even knows that—and with her, I am sure, the knowledge is safe. There, I seal your lips," and as he spoke he pressed a kiss on them. "I think Molly knows that if the secret was my own it would not be kept from her."

"You know you may trust me," she whispered, and then they entered the drawing-room together.

"How do you do, Genie? Of course I feel quite at liberty to call you Genie now. Ah, Winifred, and how are the curates getting on? Are you on their side now, or the rector's, or is it a case of 'all against all'?"

Winifred coloured and looked uncomfortable.

"Genie, I appeal to you; has not Winifred told you yet about that poor martyr Greene? I am sure all her evenings last winter were taken up in working him slippers and teapot cosies."

"Now, Rex, do be quiet. You have not been up to see father yet; he was not well enough to come down."

"I will go this instant, but first let me tell Genie about Greene. Look how interested she is in him! He has gone, Genie—hurried out of the place by all the elderly people. But never mind; for his consolation he can always remember he was followed by the sighs and tears of all the young ladies in the neighbourhood."

"You are talking great nonsense, Rex," said Winifred, warmly. But Rex interrupted her—"I see from that, that he has left a successor even more pleasing to the female heart. Poor Greene!"

Molly, seeing Winifred really looked annoyed, ventured to suggest once more Captain Burnaby should go and see his father, and this time he obeyed.

As Molly sat watching him, and listening to his slow, teasing tones, she began to believe that that scene on the stairs, when he had made her promise secrecy so earnestly, must have been a dream; and but for Arthur's disturbed looks and ill-disguised anxiety, she could scarcely have believed it had been real.

The week passed away only too quickly, and it was with a heavy heart Molly rose on the Sunday morning to remember that it was really the last day.

There was one letter on her plate when she got down to breakfast, which she did before any one else—a home letter from her mother, telling her that she and Genie were expected back the next day, and that she hoped they would not disappoint her, as she missed them very much, and the house was very dull without them, and she was, as always, their loving mother, Isabel Anstruther.

Inside was a letter enclosed from Willie—or rather, as he was generally called, Bill—which Molly was reading with an amused smile when Captain Burnaby entered the room.

"Who is your correspondent?" he asked, walking up to her and trying to take the note out of her hand.

"Bill," she replied; "you may read it if you like, as there is a message for you in it."

Taking the letter he began reading aloud:—

"DEAR MISS MOLLY,—You will be surprised to hear from me; but the reason is, that Miss Foster has been so kind as to be ill, and so we all have a holiday. I hope you will come home soon, as I am so tired of the little ones. I spent all the

morning in the stables helping John. I thought of cutting all Gip's hair off, except round his neck and ankles, so that he might look like Colonel Kingscote's dog, and be a surprise for you when you came home, but John does not think Skyes are ever done like that, so I am waiting till I see you.—Your affectionate brother, BILL.

"*P.S.*—Ask Captain Burnaby to send May the two sixpences he owes her; she has not forgotten them, if he has."

"Don't let me forget them before I go, Molly," said Captain Burnaby, as he handed her back her note; "you can tell her from me that with the interest it has mounted up to half-a-crown. It was a well-laid out shilling, was it not? Confess, Molly."

But Molly would not confess, and the entrance of the others prevented the need of any answer.

Church and the early dinner over, Rex declared his intention of taking a walk—a walk which he graciously invited Molly to share.

"I cannot stand Sunday afternoons at home," he remarked, when they were outside; "for what with school and church, there is such intense confusion that I have no time for thought—and thought is what Sunday is meant for, is it not?"

Molly laughed.

"I always tell Winifred," he went on, "she should ask her visitors to leave on Saturday night, for I think it positively wrong to let them in for such a wearying day as our Sabbath, without due preparation. As to Sunday-schools, I think they are one of the most cruel institutions of the realm. All my time is taken up while on leave trying to argue Winifred out of her taste for them."

"Useless waste of breath, I should think," remarked Molly.

"Quite. You would never think, to hear her hold forth on the subject, that she, equally with myself, has known the full horrors of Sunday teaching. Were you ever catechised in church, Molly?"

"No; I should pity any one who had the task of catechising me."

"Well, I have been, when I was young and innocent. We had a brother of my father's as rector here, and he talked over my people into letting me stand up with the Sunday-school in church. 'Such a good example,' &c. To their sore grief they found their attempt anything but successful, as I was the one who never knew anything. My uncle bore with me as long as he could; but at last, one day having been just commanded to repeat the Collect, in the pause that ensued while I was try-

ing to recollect it, and the next boy to whisper it to me, a bag of nuts that I had, and which I had in my agony got hold of, I drew from my pocket, and without a moment's warning the ground was strewed with them. How it happened, I know not; but, anyhow, it was too much for the gravity of the boys around, and in somewhat of a hurry my worthy uncle had to request we would return to our places. The way those nuts clattered and fell, each one separately, down on to the stone pavement, and the surprised looks of the congregation, who heard the noise and could see nothing, I shall never forget. It seemed to me years that they went on rolling. My uncle never forgave that offence, and never gave me a birthday present after, I remember."

"Well," said Molly, "your experience has certainly not proved fortunate. As to your uncle, I do not wonder at him; I should never have forgiven you myself."

"Should you not?" returned Rex, changing his laughing tones for more earnest ones. "Are there many things you could never forgive me?"

For all answer she looked up in his face; but there was something in the sweet brown eyes that told him better than any words that her love was not one to be easily wearied out, and he asked no more.

That walk was destined to be remembered by both of them in the terrible years that were coming, long after other things had passed away from their minds,—to be remembered by him, amid the storms and perils of a sad life, as the few moments' rest before the strife actually began; and by her it was always looked back to as a green oasis in the dreary desert that she had with tired feet to cross alone, the whole plain of burning sand stretching between them—an oasis with green palms and pleasant fountains, the echo of whose waters made music in her ears, in memory at least, long after the reality had died away in the far distance.

But at the time it was nothing to them but a pleasant, happy walk, through fair English scenery; a happier walk, and one more prized than usual, because they were together—and perhaps it was the last time they should be so for a good many weeks —but still, nothing else. Ah me! if the curtain could be sometimes lifted and the next act shown us, do you think we might benefit by it? Philosophers tell us no—seeing the many warnings man has day after day, and how seldom he profits by them, and that the greatest mercy vouchsafed to him is this one, that he cannot see into the future.

As they neared the great archway of the Manor, Molly said suddenly, "Do you think there will be war, really?"

"Very little doubt of it, I should think."

"Oh, I hope not!" and she unconsciously moved closer to his side.

"You would not make a good soldier's wife, Molly darling, and we will hope you will be one by that time."

Molly blushed and made no reply, and they entered the house.

Captain Burnaby had tried to get his leave extended, but vainly; and so on that Sunday night he was to leave by the evening train.

They had a very merry dinner. Old Sir Arthur was down for the first time since Molly's arrival, and made himself very pleasant and amusing. The only ones who were quiet and abstracted were Miss Molly and Arthur Burnaby.

Poor Molly! she did not feel at all happy. A sort of presentiment of coming evil hung over her which she could not shake off; and Arthur's sad face, as he sat beside her, seemed to reflect her own barely comprehended fears. But the dinner came to an end at last, though to those two it appeared terribly long, and Rex immediately went to prepare for his start.

When he returned he said "Good-bye" to all; and then turning to Molly, said, "Come down and see me off, child,"—and she gladly obeyed.

In the hall they found Arthur waiting for them.

"Oh Rex," he exclaimed, "I must speak to you for a minute!" and opening the door of the dining-room, beckoned him in.

"Do you mind waiting here a second, Molly?"

She seated herself on the stairs. "Not in the least,"—and the two brothers shut themselves into the dining-room. In a very few minutes Arthur reopened the door; with his hand still on the lock, he turned back to Rex.

"Then I may trust it to you?"

"Certainly; I will do my very best to stop all gossip, if I should hear any."

"Thanks so much. Good-bye," and he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, old fellow. Come in here, Molly dear; there is a light, and it is generally more cheerful than that great gloomy hall."

Molly followed Captain Burnaby into the room as Arthur returned up-stairs.

"Well, my dear one, I have not many minutes to spare; I must be off. But keep your spirits up. I daresay I shall get down to your parts before long; so good-bye, and God bless you."

"Oh Rex," said Molly, clinging to him, and for the first time using his Christian name, "I am so frightened! I cannot think what is the matter, but I am sure something is going to happen."

"Nonsense, child! Cheer up! Do remember

this is your nineteenth birthday, and consequently you are quite grown up now."

Molly smiled. "Yes, I know it is very foolish; but all the same, I cannot help it. There, I will not say another foolish word. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, darling."

She followed him out to the front door, and saw him mount into the dogcart and drive away, and then closed it—the old butler having charitably concluded that, even at the sacrifice of his helpful presence, they would prefer being alone; and that done, she ran swiftly up into her own room, and relieved herself by weeping bitterly till Genie came to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

PRIEZ POUR ELLE.

"Jar one chord, the harp is silent;
Move one stone, the arch is shattered;
One shrill, clarion cry of sorrow bids an armed host awake.
One small cloud can hide the sunlight;
Loose one string, the pearls are scattered;
Think one thought, a soul may perish; say one word, a heart may break."
—A. A. PROCTOR.

MOLLY and Genie left the Moat the next day, much to the grief of every one; for their pretty faces and soft manners had made many friends. But their mother would hear of no delay; and so on the day following Rex's departure they returned home—home to dear old Eversleigh, from which they had once wished nothing might ever part them, but from which they were beginning now to have so many separate interests.

Spring is dear to all our hearts—that no one will deny. We are glad to see the snow melting, and the grey clouds drifting away to the land of fog and snow—to see the first leaves fighting their

way bravely out into the chill March sunshine, to gladden our eyes with their tender green, and the promise that they bring with them that summer is on its way. Yes, that is, after all, the secret of our rejoicing. "Summer is coming" is the whisper that greets us all around; and so we rejoice in hope, as mariners in troubled seas will rejoice as the light streams over the waters telling them that, though their dangers are not over, yet that the haven where they would be, is in sight.

And so it was with Molly. The song of the woodbirds was finding an echo in her heart; for to her, as to all around, the summer was coming, and the promise of it made everything bright and joyous.

After they had returned from Aston, all was so much as usual—so much as it had been in the old days now so long ago, before Captain Burnaby's coming, that sometimes Genie, watching Molly's happy face, as she sang about the house or searched the Brook garden for violets, could have imagined the past was a dream, but for the opal ring, that made a link, as it were, between the present and the past.

And so to Molly, as to all else, the spring was sufficient for her, only in so far as it shadowed forth the deeper joys that were coming. And as she moved among her flowers, which always

seemed such sweet reminders of absent Rex, or played with the children, or talked with Genie, she was the same Molly as of old, wild and wilful as ever, saving when a slight shade would fall upon her, as she more fully realised the separation from home and all home ties that her happiness entailed; and sometimes she would laugh with Genie, and tell her she wondered how she had ever been persuaded to give her consent. But Rex's letters never failed to change her complaint to a question as to how she was ever to live six weeks longer without seeing him. And in all her fits of despondency, whatever might be the cause, Genie was the recipient of her woes, and her consoler, as she had always been—Genie, who, in her perfect unselfishness, almost forgot that she had any troubles or joys of her own, so completely was she wrapped up in Molly's.

And thus it was with all those in whom we are interested during the spring of 1854. As it was with many others, so it was with them — they laughed and made merry, without taking note of the steadily rising waters: and at the last, the flood came and swept them away; for while Molly and her lover had been enjoying the present, and putting the evil that was to come far from them, the thundercloud that had been hovering so long over Europe was at last on the point of breaking,

and it was destined that the great war of modern history and Molly's life-long sorrow were to begin on the same day; for on the morning that every wife and mother in England was reading, with hearts that ached at what the future might be holding in store for them, the terrible declaration of war with Russia, Molly was standing in the sunlight in the pleasant drawing-room of the Grange, a horror-stricken look on her face, while her eyes were fixed on a certain small paragraph of the paper she held in her hands. There she was still standing, more like a marble statue than a living, breathing woman, when Genie entered the the room.

"Molly," she said, in a frightened voice, as she caught a glimpse of her sister's face—"Molly dear, what is it?"

"Nothing," replied Molly, angrily, folding the paper up as she spoke, and moving past her sister to the door; and then, stopping suddenly, and throwing it on the ground between them, "You may read it, of course, if you wish to. I don't believe one word of it." And she opened the door and flew up-stairs. Genie picked up the 'Times' with a terrible fear of what she might find there. The first thing that met her eye, in large letters, was the declaration of war; but she did not even glance at it—something seemed to

tell her that was not what her sister had seen. Hastily, with trembling fingers and eager eyes, she sought up one column and down another till in one corner she saw a paragraph headed

"TERRIBLE MURDER.

"A most terrible murder was committed last night in the room of an hotel at Richmond, where several of the officers of the —th Hussars had gone down to dine. Captain Burnaby and Captain White, two officers of that regiment, who, it is said now, never have been very friendly, were engaged in an argument about some private affairs of Captain Burnaby's which his brother officer had declared himself to be acquainted with. The discussion grew warmer and warmer and at last Captain Burnaby, who is a very strong man, before any one could interfere, made an attempt in a sudden frenzy of passion to silence his adversary, by knocking him down. The attempt was only too successful, for the unfortunate man fell against a heavy piece of furniture in the room, and was picked up lifeless. Captain Burnaby appeared perfectly horrified at what he had done, and made no attempt at escape. He was taken into custody, and is at present in Guilford jail."

"Oh, Miss Molly," moaned Genie, when she had

read it through—"oh, poor Molly!" and then, paper in hand, she ran up to her mother's dressing-room, and with blanched cheeks, from which every atom of colour had fled, she laid it before her.

"Where is Molly? has she seen it?" asked her mother, breathlessly.

"She gave it to me," replied Genie, with a sob, "and said she did not believe it."

"Oh, poor darling Molly!" cried her mother, while the sad tears rolled down her cheeks. "Oh, Genie, what can we do? She is so young, Genie," said her mother, piteously, unconsciously forgetting, as she always did, that quiet Genie and wild wilful Miss Molly were the same age. "Oh that I could bear it for her!"

After all, is not a mother's the perfection of human love? It is always the mother's love that would suffer anything, so that the child may escape. It is in after-life, when we have lost it, that we realise what it is.

"Go to her, Genie," said her mother, lifting her tearful eyes to her daughter's white face—"go to her. I will come directly." Genie went; but her mission was a vain one: the door was locked, and Molly would not answer her sister's beseeching voice to let her in.

About eleven o'clock, however, as Lady Anstruther was passing Molly's room, she softly tried

the handle once more, and found that this time there was no resistance.

Opening the door gently, she looked in and saw Miss Molly—her chin resting on her hands, her elbows on the table by the window—looking, with dry, tearless eyes, out on to the dreary landscape, —for the day which had begun so bravely had changed, and the rain was falling steadily.

"Molly, dear Molly," she said, tenderly; "you will make yourself ill, if you sit there and take nothing. Promise me, if I send up Genie with some wine, you will drink it."

Without turning round, Molly answered softly, "If you like."

Then her mother went forward and laid her hand on her shoulder. "I am so sorry for you, dear," she whispered.

No answer—only a sound that might have been a sigh or a sob, and then Molly spoke—but still without turning her eyes away from the window—"I don't believe he is dead; do you?"

The first half of the sentence was very decided, but the last half drifted into a pathetic appeal.

"I hope not, dear," answered her mother. What else could she say? She could not bear to crush all hope at once: in the depths of her own heart she felt there was none.

"Wasn't Hubert coming home to-day?" asked

Molly, at length, passing her hand over her eyes as she spoke.

"Yes, dear."

"Mother, dear," turning suddenly round to Lady Anstruther, and lifting her miserable eyes to her face, "directly Hubert comes, may he take me to Aston? I could not sleep, I am sure, till I have seen them. Oh, do say yes!"

"If you wish it so much; but, in the meantime, you——"

"In the meantime I will stay here, darling. I could not bear to sit still, or be where I might see any one."

The long day dragged itself away at length. At her own request, Miss Molly was left alone. Once or twice Genie or her mother came in and spoke to her, and tried to make her move or speak; but their efforts were useless.

"If she were only not so quiet," said Lady Anstruther, pitifully, to Sir Geoffrey, "I would not be so frightened; but I never knew Molly quiet before."

So silent was the whole house, that the arrival of Hubert, towards five o'clock, was heard all over it.

To Molly—no longer standing watching the gloomy twilight, but pacing up and down her room—it came as the sound that was to give her fresh hope, or take away the last glimpse of it for ever.

Starting to her feet, she hurried into the passage, with a wild thought of escaping that which she knew was coming. She did not hesitate a moment, but walked with unsteady feet to the schoolroom.

Miss Foster, the little ones' governess, was sitting there all alone.

"Oh, Miss Foster, I did not know you were here," she said, with an attempt at a smile; "but I was so cold sitting in my own room."

Miss Foster, with whom Molly had always been a great favourite, got up and said kindly, as she stirred the fire into a blaze, "Come and sit in my arm-chair, and warm yourself; you look frozen to death."

Molly made no answer, but sat in the arm-chair, crouching over the fire for a few moments in perfect silence.

Then: "Miss Foster, Hubert has come. Would you greatly mind going down? He may have *some* news, you know."

Miss Foster rose without a word: well she knew what was the news poor Molly half hoped to hear.

"Don't tell them I am here," said Molly, looking after her; "come back yourself," and Miss Foster nodded assent.

For what seemed hours Molly waited, and then Miss Foster reappeared.

There was no need for her to speak. Molly, looking eagerly in her face, read there the terrible answer, and saw that there was no use hoping any more.

With a cry that went to Miss Foster's kind heart, she rose and faced her, and then fell senseless at her feet.

When Molly recovered from that long, merciful faint, it was to find herself lying on the sofa, and her mother bending anxiously over her. Gradually, as consciousness returned, the stern realities, which she had lost sight of for a few brief moments, returned also, and came once more to her remembrance; and at that remembrance she started up, exclaiming, "Is Hubert here? Then, may I go to Aston? You know you promised."

"Indeed, dear Molly," said her mother—"indeed, you are not fit. Wait till to-morrow; and if you are better, I will not say a word against it."

Molly made no reply to that: perhaps she did not feel herself very able to perform the journey.

"Hubert," began her mother again, after a little pause, but Molly lifted her head deprecatingly. "Oh, I know what he would say, and indeed I cannot bear to hear it."

"You shall hear nothing," replied her mother, kissing her; "all I was going to say was, that Hubert has brought Colonel Kingscote down with him."

At that name Molly opened her eyes, and spoke in a tone more full of life. "I should like to speak to Colonel Kingscote, mother, if he does not mind coming to see me here."

"Well, after dinner, if you are a good child, and eat something, I will send him up." Molly readily promised, and her mother left her, to send Genie.

It was late in the evening when Colonel Kingscote found his way to the schoolroom. Molly had seated herself in the arm-chair by the fire, with the determination in her heart that nothing should make her give way in the least; but the sight of Colonel Kingscote's eyes looking sadly and sympathisingly into her own, and the gentle sound of his voice, recalled so many happy days, that for a minute she felt even the outward show of courage deserting her. But with a little effort she forbade her mind to stray to the past, and, holding out her hand, said, "How do you do?"

"How do you do, Miss Anstruther?" he replied, gently; and then there was a long silence, while he sat on the other side of the fireplace, furtively glancing every now and then at the white face opposite, from which the faint tinge of colour that had appeared at his approach was gradually fading away. She was the first to speak, after all. With eyes fixed on the red coals, in a low, steady voice,

at length she said, "Were you there, Colonel Kingscote?"

"No, indeed I was not," he replied, rising from his seat, and coming and standing by her side. "I believe if I had been, it would never have come to this; for I could generally make Burnaby attend to me."

"What was it, really?" she asked, after another little pause.

"I cannot tell you much. Poor White had got hold of some story that he chaffed him about, and which, from all I can gather now, there was some truth in—that was the beginning; and the end——"

"Oh, stop!" cried Molly, with a shudder; and then, "I must hear it all. I know," she went on, excitedly, "there is more in it than I have heard yet, and until I have heard all, I cannot judge;" and there stopped short.

"There *is* more," said Colonel Kingscote, tenderly. "It is Rex's secret, so I will not repeat it; but I believe if you went to Winifred, she would be able *now* to tell you the whole truth."

"Will you take me to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you are better."

"Oh, I shall never be better till I see them. You must promise to take me, will you?"

"I promise."

He hesitated a moment by her side, as though unwilling to leave her in her great desolation, and then at last he said in a low voice, "I have seen him."

The blood mounted quickly to her cheeks at that, and she looked up in his eyes imploringly, holding out a little trembling hand, which he took and clasped between both of his.

"They thought I had better not tell you; but somehow, I could not help it."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried; "do tell me all! What message did he send to me?"

"He asked me to come down to-night and tell you; he hoped you would not have heard it before."

"Oh, I wish I had not!" she moaned; "I would so much rather you had told me; for you love him too, do you not?"

"Yes, my dear, I do indeed"—and the man's voice trembled as he spoke; "he is my friend—the greatest friend I have; and to hear of his having wrought all this misery has almost broken my heart. But still, Molly," he added, more hopefully, "we must always remember he is our friend, and not desert him in the time of his sorrow, though it is his own sin that has caused the sorrow."

Molly's tears were flowing fast now, but still through her tears she answered bravely, "It will be a hard battle, Colonel Kingscote, I feel assured —a battle in which, God help us! I think you and I will be fighting for Rex against the whole world."

CHAPTER XIII.

A TANGLED WEB.

"Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary."
—LONGFELLOW.

THAT long miserable journey into Berkshire, Colonel Kingscote never forgot as long as he lived. The remembrance of it clung to him for ever, as disagreeable things have a way of doing long after their pleasanter companions are forgotten. But it came to an end at last; and about five o'clock on the evening after Molly had read that dreadful paragraph, he and his companion found themselves at the Manor. They were shown into the drawing-room by a servant, who said that Miss Burnaby was engaged with her father, who was very ill, but that he would send some one to her, to let her know Colonel Kingscote wished to see her.

Molly had remained firm till then, but the sight of the room where she had known such happy days

brought back to her the dreadful desolation of her sorrow, and she sank into an arm-chair and burst into tears.

"Don't, my dear," said Colonel Kingscote, soothingly; "you must not grieve like this. You have been so brave hitherto, and it is nearly over now."

"Nearly over!" echoed Molly; "it seems to me that it is only just beginning. Think of all there may be yet to come!"

"Hush, child! Don't try to look into the future; the present is a burden quite hard enough to be borne."

And then, not liking to appear to be watching her in her sorrow, and feeling that there was no comfort he *could* offer her, he got up to leave the room, saying he would go and see if Arthur was at home.

In a few minutes Winifred appeared. She started on seeing a woman's figure crouched up in the arm-chair, for she had not known that there was any one with Colonel Kingscote.

"Is it you, Molly?" she questioned, at length, as Molly never spoke.

"Yes, it is I!" she exclaimed, starting up, and raising her sad, tearful eyes to Winifred's face, and holding out her hands—"it is I. I am come to hear what you have to tell me."

"Oh Molly," said Winifred, taking the out-

stretched hand, "if you are broken-hearted, what must I be?—I, who have known and loved him all his life—I, his own sister!" and she broke down altogether, and buried her face in her hands. "Oh, Molly, Molly, I was so proud of him!"

"And cannot I, his future wife, feel for you?"

She had not yet learned to speak of that future as a doubtful one.

For a few minutes they sat thus, hand clasped in hand, silent and thoughtful, and then Molly spoke again—

"What is this story I am to hear, Winifred? Colonel Kingscote told me there was one, and that you would tell it to me."

"Not I," said Winifred, harshly. "Let the man who has wrought all the evil tell his own story, and make his own excuses to you. As for me, though he is my own brother, I feel that it will be very, very long, before I can say that I forgive him from my heart."

"Hush," said Molly, lifting a warning hand, as she saw what Winifred had not—Arthur Burnaby standing in the doorway.

"Winifred," he exclaimed, "have you no mercy? Do you not think we all suffer equally?—that it is not ten times worse for me to feel that it is all *my* fault?"

"Let me hear all," said Molly; "tell me the

whole story—that is to say, if you," looking at Arthur as she spoke, "do not mind doing so. *He*," with a little stress on the "he," "wished me to hear it."

"Certainly," Arthur replied; "you have every right to know everything, and you shall."

"Well," said Winifred, rising; "I must go back to my father. You, Molly, shall stay here with Arthur. Arthur," she said, turning round as she reached the door, "I am sorry you should have heard what you did. Of course, I know it is worse for you than any of us; but sometimes—God help me!—I feel almost mad." And then with a little sob—"Arthur, I loved him so!"

Arthur, who was standing looking out of the window, turned round as though to say something; but she was gone.

Finding that Molly and he were alone, he left the window, and moved over to the fireplace.

"Molly," at length he said.

She looked up.

"I am afraid to tell you now. You see how I have made Winifred hate me; and my father, my poor father, whom I love more dearly than any one in the world, save one, I have nearly killed him, and Rex;—look what I have done to all my friends, by telling them this story; and you, Molly, I love you already as my sister. I am

afraid to risk losing your affection, and so I have made up my mind as to what I shall do. I shall leave here to-night, and you need never see me again. After I am gone, go to Winifred, and get her to tell you everything—just the hard, bare facts, as she will tell them—and then think of me as hardly, as unpityingly as you will. Good-bye. But in the future years—if you should ever be happy again yourself—I charge you to remember him who changed your laughter into weeping, and pray that you may learn to forgive him."

He had said "Good-bye" again, almost before she had realised what the meaning of his words was; but when she did, she rose up and held out her hand.

"Arthur, whatever you may have done, to me you are now, and will be for ever, Rex's brother, and very dear if only on that account. But oh, Arthur! what is it?" she went on; "let me hear and judge. Be sure that I should be the very last person to throw a stone. Are you not my brother?" And she smiled a little tearful smile.

"You must try and forgive me, then; but your powers will have to be extended to the utmost. I have been married, Molly, for eight years"

Molly looked up incredulously.

"Yes; it is true, nevertheless. Rex found it out, and advised me years ago to confess to my

father; but somehow I put it off and off, always hoping an easier moment would arrive, and at last it seemed impossible. See what comes of being a coward, Molly! It was just that. I could not bear that my father and sister, and indeed all who knew me and liked me, should have to forfeit their good opinion of me in a moment. Oh, Molly, Molly! what must you think of me?"

"I think nothing about you," she replied, gravely; "for, of course, not knowing your temptations, I cannot decide for you how far you have been right or wrong, except that it must be wrong always to live in a false position. But what did all this have to do with Rex?"

"You have heard him speak of that unfortunate Captain White?"

"Yes," said Molly, with a shudder.

"Well, he, Rex, told me when he was here with you that, from some words White had let drop, he feared the story of my marriage was oozing out; and he promised me to stop any gossip as far as was in his power on his return."

"Yes; I remember," interrupted Molly, as those few parting words of the brothers recurred to her mind.

"You may imagine Rex's surprise, then, on that evening at Richmond, to find that it was not I who was generally supposed to be married, but himself;

for White, who had fished out somehow that he was engaged, asked him some very insulting questions as to what he was going to do with the first Mrs Burnaby, and that sort of thing. Rex got very angry, and——"

"Stop!" cried Molly, with a gasp, holding out her hand; "I can't bear to hear the rest."

He was silent then; but presently he roused himself to say, in a broken voice, "Can you still say you forgive me?"

"Oh, I forgive you!" cried poor Molly; "I forgive you, certainly: you are his brother, and you loved him, and meant *him* no harm; and I—I am too miserable to be angry."

There were tears in his eyes as he turned away and left her.

After that, Molly went up to see old Sir Arthur. The first glance convinced her that what Arthur had feared had come true, and that the revealing of his secret had been the signing of his father's death-warrant. He was kind and gentle with Molly, who had always been a great favourite of his; but he spoke hardly of the son who had deceived him—the son whom he had loved better than any one on the earth.

"Mary, Mary!" he cried; "to think I should have lived to rejoice that his mother was dead! I cannot understand it, Mary; can you?" he went on.

"Yes, I can," said Molly, sadly; "at least, I think I can: he is weak, you see, and he put it off from day to day; he always meant to tell you sometime—I am sure he did."

"You are good and kind, Mary; but eight years is a long time, and I loved and trusted him so, and to think that he was deceiving me all the time —and Rex too!" But Molly interrupted him— "No, you must say nothing against him. Indeed you must not; I cannot bear it," and her voice broke down into a sort of sob.

After a pause, she spoke again—

"Sir Arthur, who was she?"

"Do you mean Arthur's wife?"

Molly nodded.

"She was the daughter of one of the farmers about here. I remember her years ago: she used to be a nice-looking, pleasant-spoken girl. Then one day she disappeared from the village, and was heard of no more. Every one was ready enough to whisper evil of her after that, and not to whisper it even, but to speak it out pretty broadly; and Arthur could stay on here, and listen to such things said about—his wife."

There was intense and bitter scorn in his voice as he spoke those last words. None but himself could understand how he, who had held himself so far away from the faintest shadow of a lie all his

life, despised the man who could live and act one for years.

"We must not be too hard on him," said Molly, soothingly; "we do not know how he may have been tempted;" and then Winifred came to take her place by her father's side.

Colonel Kingscote had told Molly that he would have to return to Hounslow on the morrow. He had told her also how that the war, which had dwindled down in her mind to such insignificance in face of the great personal ills that had fallen to her own share, demanded he should get back to his regiment as soon as possible; but the full truth of what he had been saying did not dawn on her until, on wishing her good night, he said it must be good-bye, as he and Arthur were both going to leave early in the morning. Then something seemed to tell her the object of this journey, and she awoke from the stupor in which she had been sitting all the evening, and rousing herself, looked in his face and said pitifully—"Don't leave me here, Colonel Kingscote; oh, please take me with you!"

"My dear," he replied, "what good would it do? You are much better here, where Winifred will take care of you; or if you would rather go to your own home, Arthur shall take you back first."

But Molly only shook her head, and spoke more pleadingly yet, clasping his hand in both of hers.

"No, no," she repeated; "take me with you; I will be no trouble at all. Lean your head down and listen a minute." Cecil obeyed. "You are going to see him; I know you are. Oh, Colonel Kingscote, you have done so much for me already! just do that one thing more, and I will never ask for anything again. Let me go and see him."

Colonel Kingscote looked wildly round for help: he had not the heart to say No; and yet, how was it to be done? "Molly, don't you see, my dear, that it would be impossible? But I will tell you what I can do; I can write to Lady Anstruther to-night, and persuade her to come up to London directly, if you like, and then you can join her there." But Molly made no answer. She did not let go his hand, but stood with bent head in front of him, thinking. "Don't you think," at last she said, slowly—"don't you think I could go up with you, and come back in the same day? Arthur, I am sure, would bring me back."

"What's that about me?" said Arthur, catching his own name, and coming up to them.

"Miss Anstruther wants to go to London with us to-morrow, Burnaby, and I am telling her I am sure it would be impossible. I do not think she is fit to go and come back in the same day."

"Oh yes, indeed I am!" exclaimed Molly,

eagerly; "I will do anything if you will only take me—do!"

But still Colonel Kingscote looked doubtful, till Arthur said, "She can stay the night with my wife, if she would like it. Janet would take great care of her."

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Molly, excitedly. "Now, Colonel Kingscote, you can say nothing, can you?"

"Your mother," began Cecil,—but Molly would listen to no further objections.

"I will write to my mother myself," she said; "I know she will not be angry—she trusts you so."

"Well, I am afraid," replied Colonel Kingscote, "that she will never trust me again, when she hears what foolish things I have let you do." But for the sake of the brighter look in the dark eyes, foolish or not, he could not have said her nay, if the decision had had to be made over again.

A long, sleepless night, spent in pacing up and down her room, or lying on her bed gazing into the darkness with wide-open, aching eyes; a hasty breakfast; another weary railway journey; a drive through the many sights and sounds of London,—and then Molly awoke from this confused dream, to find herself tired in body and mind, standing at the door of a house in a quiet street that led out of Portman Square. Colonel Kingscote followed her

into the little front drawing-room, and stood for a moment to say a few words to her, while Mr Burnaby went up-stairs to warn his wife of her visitor.

"When will you take me?" asked Molly, breathlessly, directly they were alone; "to-day?"

"No, not to-day," replied Cecil, gently; "it is too late; and besides, I must go down to Hounslow this afternoon. But I shall come up the first thing to-morrow, and then you shall go to him."

"You are not deceiving me, are you, Colonel Kingscote, to keep me quiet? You have promised, have you not?"

"Certainly, my dear. Deceive you! Have I ever done so, that you should doubt me now?" And there was a shade of reproof in his voice as he spoke.

"Please forgive me!" exclaimed Molly; "but, indeed, I don't seem to know what I am saying;" and as she spoke, she looked up into his face, and saw there something that convinced her that Colonel Kingscote was not the man to betray any one, least of all a woman such as she was, trusting in him in this terrible hour of adversity.

"I forgive your doubts, Molly, for you have been sorely tried. But now,—are you attending to what I am saying?"

"Yes."

"Well, are you going to write to your mother, or shall I?"

"I would much rather you did," said Molly, "for I am so bewildered, I don't think I could remember anything to say. If you will just tell her why I am here. You can say it was my own fault coming, but that I was so miserable," and here she broke off a little disconnectedly. "You understand?"

"Yes, perfectly, my dear; so don't fret about it, I will make it all right; and as for you—well, you must have a good night's rest, and get all the strength you can for to-morrow. Mrs Burnaby will, I am sure, be most kind to you; she seems very pleasant, as far as I can judge from the little I have seen of her. Good-bye."

He held out his hand and took Molly's; but still he lingered, as though unwilling to leave her without a shadow of comfort.

"Good-bye," at last she said, lifting her eyes to his—"good-bye, and thank you so very much for all you have done for me. I shall be more grateful some day, but at present I do not seem to have the power of speaking. If you were my own brother you could not have done more for me."

"I hope to be so some day, dear," he whispered, and then he left her, wondering in a vague sort of way at his farewell words. The meaning flashed

on her afterwards, when her mind was not so filled with her sorrows; but on that evening that he first betrayed his secret, it conveyed very little to her mind.

By-and-by Molly, sitting on the sofa, wrapped in her own sad thoughts, became aware that some one had entered the room, and she roused herself with something like curiosity to look at Arthur Burnaby's wife.

Janet Ryan had never been handsome, even in her girlhood, when she had first won the love of young Mr Burnaby. She had been then exactly what Sir Arthur had described her, a good-looking, pleasant-spoken girl; and now she was exactly the same, only bearing on her face the marks that told of the hopes and cares of her eight years of wifehood.

No one would ever have called her a lady; and yet no one could ever say that they had seen her do an unlady-like thing, or heard an unlady-like word pass her lips.

"My poor dear!" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of Molly sitting forlornly in the dark—"my poor dear, I am so glad you came to me! How tired you look!" she went on, as she saw the white face and sad eyes. And then she took off her bonnet and shawl, and sat down on the sofa beside her, and put cushions under her head, and did all she

could to make her more comfortable. "Would you rather go up to your own room directly it is ready?" she said at last; "it will rest you so much more."

"Please," said Molly, "if it is no trouble, I think I should like to, for I am so very tired, and my head aches so."

"Of course you shall; it will not take very long:" and she went away to give an order about Molly's room.

Once in bed—the curtains drawn to keep the light from her tired eyes, and Mrs Burnaby putting eau-de-Cologne on her aching head — Molly felt more nearly at rest than she had done since that dreadful morning she had read the news in the drawing-room at home; and it was a relief to have some one who knew everything, and to whom, therefore, nothing had to be told. Mrs Burnaby's sympathy did not jar on her; it was so ready and so outspoken, and came so evidently from a kind, warm heart, that Molly could not feel hurt at it: and besides, it was happiness to listen to any one who loved Rex as Mrs Burnaby did. She was never weary of singing his praises; and it was so long, or at any rate seemed so long, since Molly had heard his name mentioned, save as the author of all this misery, that that was in itself a pleasure.

Perhaps not the highest lady in the land could have done for Molly that night what kind, homely Janet Burnaby, the farmer's daughter of Vale Regis, had done—namely, hushed her into a long, quiet sleep, from which she never woke till the dawn was breaking over London.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE WILL FIND OUT THE WAY.

"Bid me to weep, and I will weep,
While I have eyes to see;
Or, having none, then I will keep,
A *heart* to weep for thee."

—HERRICK.

"I SHALL see him to-day," was Molly's first thought; and notwithstanding Janet's entreaties that she would lie still and rest a little longer, she got up directly after breakfast and crept down to the sitting-room, so that she might be ready at any time Colonel Kingscote should come for her. Arthur had gone out; only his little son, a boy of about six years old, was playing about when she opened the door.

Molly took very little notice of him then; she sat down by the window where she could see up and down the street; and the child, after looking at her a minute or two inquiringly, as is the way

of children, returned to the game that her entrance had interrupted.

Shortly after that, however, his mother opened the door and called him away. The child obeyed, but not without another backward glance at the stranger. "Now listen, Reginald, you must go and stay in the nursery this morning, because that poor lady is ill, and wants to be quiet." That was Mrs Burnaby's reason to the child: the real thought deep at the bottom of her kind heart was, that perhaps it would vex Molly to hear the child's name; he had been christened Reginald, after his uncle and godfather.

All the bright morning Molly sat vainly watching out of the window, till at last hope deserted her, and she began to fear that Colonel Kingscote had failed her; but about twelve o'clock Mrs Burnaby, who was sitting knitting by her side, heard an exclamation that made her look up—

"What is it?" she asked.

"There is a cab at the door," Molly answered; "I should think it must be the Colonel; should not you?"

Before Mrs Burnaby had time to hazard a guess, Cecil was in the room.

"Have you come for me?" exclaimed Molly, springing forward.

"Yes; go and put on your bonnet, and we will start."

Almost as insensibly as she had performed the journey yesterday, Molly performed this one to-day. Colonel Kingscote wondered, as he looked at her, how long she would be able to stand the strain, and how dearly she would have to pay for it afterwards. As to Molly, she was aware of no outward things—indeed of nothing but the one fact that she was going to see *him*, till she found herself, her trembling hands clasped round Colonel Kingscote's arm, in a small room, and a man's voice saying he would show them the way.

The man's voice was a kind one, and the man's eyes she would have seen had she looked up, which she did not, were fixed pityingly on the pretty, slight, black-robed, black-veiled figure before him.

"Courage!" Colonel Kingscote whispered, for a moment laying his strong hand over the trembling fingers that rested on his arm—"courage! you have been so brave hitherto, you must not give way now. See, we are there; so good-bye. I shall come for you again in half an hour. God bless you, Molly;" and then once more whispering "courage!" he almost carried her into the room, and left her.

For a full minute after hearing the sound of the key in the lock, Molly remained perfectly motionless; and then throwing back her veil, she lifted

her eyes and looked around her. Rex Burnaby, who had glanced up at the sound of the door opening, and perceiving a woman enter, for a moment imagined it might be his sister; but as she threw aside her veil and looked round with that frightened, wild look in her lovely eyes, and he saw who it was, he forgot the dreary past, forgot that he was in prison on the charge of murder, forgot everything but those bright, happy days at Aston, and stretching out his arms, exclaimed, "Miss Molly! my darling Miss Molly!"

With a little cry of unutterable joy she threw herself on his breast, "Oh, Rex, Rex!" she sobbed, "I began to fear I should never see you again."

At those words memory came back to him: he remembered the vows he had made in his loneliness, and that he had forgotten on first seeing her. Putting her at arm's-length from him, he stooped down and looked into her face.

"Do you know what I am, Molly? What do you come for? Don't you know that we are farther asunder than if one of us had lived hundreds of years ago? Do you remember that I am in here on the charge of murder?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" moaned Molly, throwing her arms round his neck—"oh, hush! or you will break my heart! Whatever you may have done, I can

remember nothing save that you are my own Rex, my future husband. Do you think that anything you may have done, or yet may do, could make me forget that?"

"Thank you, Molly," he said, kissing her fondly; "I shall like to remember in the future years that you said that, after you had heard everything."

"Do you think, then," she exclaimed, "that it is possible that I could ever love you less than I do now?"

"Yes, darling, I am afraid it is possible; I am selfish enough to fear it is. But though we should be separated from one another by worlds, we shall have the satisfaction, shall we not, Molly, of having a past to look back upon?"

"Oh, don't talk of the past yet, Rex! there must be a future for us—it would break my heart if I could not think so. You are strong and can bear it, perhaps; but I am not, so in pity spare me."

"Spare you, my darling! as if there were anything in the wide world I would not do to spare you!"

"Well, you must never talk about me again as separated from you. It does not matter in the least how far asunder we may be so long as we love one another, does it?"

At the sound of her soft, pleading voice, he

looked down into the sweet face raised to his. "You are so young, sweet Molly, and so hopeful, that it quite cheers me up to see you."

"I am glad of that," she replied, simply; and for his sake she let no shadow of the trouble that was making her heart ache, with the fear of the woe that was so surely coming upon them, appear in her eyes.

"Who brought you?" asked Rex, after a minute's pause.

"Colonel Kingscote. He is coming again to fetch me presently."

"Poor Cecil! And Arthur,—Molly dear, have you heard about him?"

"Yes, Rex; I am staying with Mrs Burnaby. Rex," moving a little closer to him, "I was so sorry about him. You are not angry with him, are you?"

"Angry with Arthur!" said Rex, in a surprised tone; "why?"

"Why! Because it seems to me that it was all his fault."

"Never say that again, Molly: it was quite my own fault, quite. I was mad, I think;" and Rex spoke so decidedly, although so tenderly, that Molly dared say no more on that subject.

There was a little silence after that, and then Rex broke it by asking—"And how do you like Mrs Burnaby? Come and sit down by me, and tell me."

"Oh, so much!" replied Molly; "she has been so kind to me, and it has been a pleasure," she added, with a sigh, "being near any one who is so fond of you;" and as she spoke, she pressed a little kiss on the hand she held clasped in hers.

"Which means, sweet one, I suppose, that my other friends are not as fond of me as they were."

"Well," said Molly, doubtfully, "I think your own people, Rex, are hard. I don't know, I am sure—perhaps I am wrong: but I was so very, very miserable; and so, I suppose, Mrs Burnaby's sympathy was extra sweet."

"Poor Miss Molly!" he said, softly; "it would have been better, would it not, if we had never got up those *tableaux vivants*, or had those drives together?"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, starting up; "you must never say that again, Rex—never. Why, if it were not for the knowledge of your love, I think this would have killed me. This is dreadful, of course; but I always think what it might have been if you had left me, as I once feared you would."

"Poor Miss Molly," he repeated, drawing her once more closer towards him, and kissing away the tears that trembled on her eyelashes; "I wonder what there was in me, that should ever have made

me win your love. I am afraid, child, I am most unworthy of it."

It was not long after that, the door opened to admit Colonel Kingscote, who had returned for Molly. The two men shook hands in silence, and then Captain Burnaby said, "I shall never be able to thank you, Kingscote, for all you have done for me and, above all," touching Molly's bent head, "for this."

"I am not sure," replied Colonel Kingscote, "that *this*," with a smile, "was at all a wise proceeding, and I am dreadfully afraid of what her mother will say to me. I suppose," he added, with a glance at Molly, "somebody's pleading could not be resisted. But now, my dear, you promised to be good and come away when I told you, and I tell you now."

As he finished speaking, Molly raised her face for Rex's farewell kiss, without which she had never parted from him since their engagement; and then, without a word or a single backward glance, she followed Colonel Kingscote out — followed him, leaving Rex Burnaby standing where he had stooped to give that kiss, with folded arms, to think of the white face and tearful eyes, and to ponder over the wreck he had made of her happy life, and then to remember certain words some one

had let fall about that unfortunate Captain White —who, he could not now recall—words that had rung in his ears night and day since that terrible 28th of March,—"Well, there was one point in his favour, disagreeable as he always was. He was a good son; the only son, too, and his mother a widow!" and with a groan, he thought how impossible it is to bear the full punishment of our sins ourselves.

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING.

"Oh, but ill,
When with rich hopes o'erfraught, the young high heart
Bears its first blow; it knows not yet the part
Which life will teach—to suffer and be still."

In the meantime, whilst Molly was getting that glimpse of Rex that was to last her such a long time, great excitement was prevailing at the Hall. Colonel Kingscote's letter had arrived, and Lady Anstruther was in sore perplexity.

"It would never do," as she told her husband, "to leave Molly in her trouble to the mercy of strangers;" and yet it seemed cruel to take her away from London at once; and so, after much talking and discussion, it was settled that Lady Anstruther and Genie should go up to town, and stay there till—but even to their own hearts they did not say till when.

"And, Geoffrey, what will you do?" asked his wife. "Will you come?"

"No," he replied; "at least, not yet. I am too old to be gadding about, and you can comfort Molly better than I; but before Hubert sails, I will come up so as to see him."

In this great present misery, Lady Anstruther had almost forgotten that other one that was now not so far off—namely, her son's departure for the Crimea. And so it came to pass, the morning after Molly's visit to Rex, Mrs Burnaby was startled by the entrance of a visitor into the room where she was sitting alone sewing, for Molly had not as yet made her appearance. She had been so excited and worn out with all she had undergone the last two or three days, that Mrs Burnaby had persuaded her to stay in bed, and try and gain rest for her aching head. And so it came to pass, as I said, that Mrs Burnaby was quite alone when the maid announced, "Lady Anstruther," who entered, and held out her hand, and said, "How do you do, Mrs Burnaby? I am so glad to see you, and to be able to thank you for all your kindness to my dear Molly."

"I am sure I am very glad to have had the poor thing with me, for it is a sad trial for her,—and she so young too!"

And then Mrs Burnaby, at Lady Anstruther's request, told her the whole story of Molly's visit to Rex the day before. "And really," she said, in

conclusion, "I could not find it in my heart to say a word against it, though I thought perhaps it was a bit foolish; and Arthur said he was sure you would forgive me my share of it."

"Yes, certainly; I think you have been everything that is kind. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go up and see Molly, for Genie would never forgive me if I did not take her back with me."

Mrs Burnaby rose with her visitor, and with a flush on her cheeks—"I hope, my lady," she began, in a faltering voice, "that you do not think very hardly of me for my part in all this dreadful misery?"

"Hardly! no," replied Lady Anstruther, holding out her hand and taking Mrs Burnaby's; "indeed, no. I could not think hardly of any one who had been as good to Molly as you have been."

Janet Burnaby always had been, and always would be, in her own eyes at least, Janet the farmer's daughter, who had won the early love of the young heir of Aston Manor, who had dreamt her love-dreams over her bread-making and churning, and who had found them realised first of all far away from her own home in a dull London lodging. But though at first she had fretted a little for the fresh country air, and the happy farm life she had hitherto led, still she had always remembered with grateful thanks that the love she had

won had never grown weary in all the years they had lived together, as is so often the case in these unequal marriages; and so she had put her shoulder to the wheel right willingly, and had fought her way through a somewhat careworn life, her hand clasped in that of her husband's, helping him as much as in her lay, and smoothing away many anxious cares by her brave, loving smiles and words, till at last she stood on this afternoon in her own drawing-room the acknowledged wife of the heir of Aston Manor, but the same Janet as of old, even to the "my lady," which took her mind back so strangely to that other lady whom she had been wont to address so on sunny afternoons in the Sunday-school—Arthur's mother, who had so long been called to rest. Not a great lady was Janet Burnaby; no, not by any means: never would she make such a *grande dame* as Lady Anstruther, now standing before her, and contemplating her pleasant face, but a very sweet, loving wife and mother, for all that; and so Lady Anstruther thought as she turned from her to go up to Molly's room.

And so it came to pass that the Anstruthers took rooms in a hotel, and established themselves in London, and there waited patiently the day that was slowly but surely drawing nearer and nearer.

There are times that age us more than years of ordinary life, and this was one of them.

"Poor Molly!" Lady Anstruther would often say, as she glanced up and caught a glimpse of her daughter's face gazing listlessly out into the streets —"poor Molly! how will it all end?"

And her heart ached when she thought of the separation that was so surely coming. Two or three times Colonel Kingscote, who was an almost daily visitor, had taken Molly to see Rex, and once Lady Anstruther had gone herself. What the result of her visit was, never transpired; but after that, her manner of speaking of him was, if possible, more soft and pitying than ever—but then he had always been a great favourite of hers.

And all the time, the great tragedy that was about to convulse Europe was approaching nearer and nearer—only, by the Anstruthers, the ripples from the stone that had been thrown into their own pond circled out so far that they had no time to look and see the storm that was agitating the ocean beyond, until at last it was forced upon their notice by the arrival of Sir Geoffrey to say good-bye to his son, who was to go out to the Crimea with the first troops that left.

And so time passed somehow with the principal actors till the evening before the trial, when Genie, who had been up-stairs trying to comfort Molly, on coming down in the gloaming, and opening the drawing-room door, saw some one seated there.

"Are you there, Colonel Kingscote?" she said, holding out her hand; "I had no idea you had come. Let me ring for candles."

"No, please don't; it is so much nicer as it is. I only came to ask you whether you had persuaded Molly not to go to-morrow?"

"No; I am sorry to say, nothing will make her give in to that. She says you promised to take her, and go she will. I am not sure myself," she added, "that it is not best she should, for I verily believe she would go mad shut up here all day waiting to know the verdict."

"Perhaps you are right. How is she?"

"Oh, Colonel Kingscote," exclaimed Genie—and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke—"don't speak of her; it makes me miserable even to think of her—as she was, and as she is!"

"Don't cry," said Colonel Kingscote, kindly; "it makes *me* miserable to see you so unhappy, and not be able to help you; for I am very fond of you, Genie. I sometimes wonder if you are fond of me too," he said, after a pause.

She made no answer.

"Genie," said Colonel Kingscote, taking her hand in his, and speaking in a lower voice, "listen to me, my dear; and if you do not think it unkind of me speaking of myself on this dreadful day, will you answer my question now? I know I

am not young, dear, or indeed have anything much to recommend me, saving my love, which has been yours ever since I knew you, I think. Genie," he cried, taking her hands in his, "tell me if when all this terrible trouble is over I come and claim you as my wife, what will your answer be? Say Yes if you can, and forgive me if I have only added more troubles to those you have already."

"I have nothing to forgive," said Genie, softly, but her tears fell as she spoke, thinking of heart-broken Molly up-stairs, and then of her own happiness.

Cecil understood the tears, and the reason for them, and as he kissed her tenderly, he whispered, "We will be friends only, Genie, till after to-morrow—is it not best so?" and Genie nodded assent.

For a few minutes they stood talking in the dark window, lighted only by the gas-lamp outside; and Genie, looking up into Cecil's honest eyes, felt that, through all the years to come, she might trust in him,—that it was not the mad passion of a boy she had roused, but something far better and higher—the steady, life-long love of a man; and she dimly wondered what it was in her that made such a man prefer her above all women.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOPE IS DEAD.

"How much is wasted, wrecked, forgot,
On this side heaven!"
—J. INGELOW.

THE morning of the 5th of July at last! As bright and glorious a morning as any one could wish to see. Not a cloud in the broad blue sky above, and the sun shining down on the hot pavements and brick houses of London, as though they were the green trees and pleasant lanes of Berkshire. Genie was standing in the gloomy room of the hotel, dimly dreaming over her own joy and Molly's sorrow—her eyes wandering meanwhile to Molly's figure, leaning listlessly against the window-sill.

For many, many years to come, she always felt a pain strike to her heart on glancing upwards into the cloudless blue of any midsummer's day.

But there was very little time for thought; for

that day which they had all been dreading so long—that day which held in its gift the misery or happiness of a lifetime—had come: and now that it had come, there were some who would willingly have lost that day for ever, so that, sweetly and peacefully, they might have slept through it, and woke on the morrow with no shadow on the future.

But, alas! the evil days have to be lived, even as the good; the evil days that are sent as warnings or threatenings, and also—and these are the saddest of all—as punishments: and so, as the punishment will come either in this world or the next, let us avoid the sins which it assuredly follows. It had been decided at last, though very much against Lady Anstruther's wish, that Molly should go down to the court. "As for me," she said, when discussing the question with Colonel Kingscote, "you must not ask it. I am too old to endure what I consider unnecessary sorrow, and this would be so to me."

"If Molly would only see it in the same light," returned Colonel Kingscote, "how much better it would be! Could you not persuade her?"

"I am afraid it is impossible—she is so bent upon it; and really, she is not in a fit state to be argued with, poor child!"

"Yes, poor child, indeed! If she would only understand, it will be so very much worse than

waiting quietly here, and hearing the verdict from me."

"It is the waiting quietly she dreads, and which I verily believe she is incapable of doing. *I* am content to wait any amount of time, anything to avoid meeting my fate half-way; but *she* would rather rush headlong into the thick of the fight, so as to get the encounter over quicker. It is just the difference between youth and age, Colonel Kingscote."

"What about Sir Geoffrey? Will he go?"

"Oh no," replied Lady Anstruther, "certainly not. Indeed he is not in a fit state for any such terrible excitement. No. As Molly cannot be made to hear reason, I must ask you to take them. By *them* I mean Genie too, of course. Molly must not go alone; and I trust you, Colonel Kingscote, to be thoughtful for Molly, and spare her as much as you can."

"I only wish she would spare herself altogether; but of course, you know, you may trust me to do everything in my power. Arthur will go with us, I am sure; and, between us, we shall be able to take care of them—if Molly does not change her mind before then."

"You are always so kind," she said, gratefully, as the interview was concluded by Genie's entering the room. In her heart of hearts Lady Anstruther

had long ago guessed Colonel Kingscote's secret. Perhaps she had guessed, also, that if it were not for the sad shadow in which they were living, the secret would ere now have been one no longer; and also, we may feel certain, that she knew, when the time for its revelation came, what the answer would be. Anyhow, when Genie sought her mother on that evening that the Colonel had asked her to be his wife, and told her, in her soft, gentle way, the great turning-point she had arrived at in her life, Lady Anstruther was not altogether surprised. "I just wished you to know, dear mother," said Genie, kissing her; "but, otherwise, neither Cecil nor I will tell any one else just yet;" and her mother understood and respected her wish for silence.

Impassive as any statue to all that was going on around her was Molly on that same 5th of July. Without a word she let Genie put on her bonnet and veil, and only once did she open her lips at all—that was when Genie, in a hesitating way, suggested she had better put on some cooler dress than she had been wearing lately, as the day was very hot. Upon which Molly, in a sharp, quick voice, most unlike her usual soft tones, replied, "No, certainly not; the black, of course,"—and Genie obeyed in silence. After that she did not speak for a long time—not till some one came and knocked at the door to ask if they were ready;

then she turned round and looked beseechingly at Genie, and turned so white that her sister feared she was going to faint.

"What is it, dear?" she said, throwing her arm round her—"what is it?"

"Oh, I cannot go—indeed I cannot," Molly whispered; "don't let them ask me."

"Not if you do not wish it. Pray don't be frightened; no one wishes you to go in the very least," replied her sister, soothingly. But her voice seemed to recall all Molly's determination. Pushing Genie aside, she started to her feet.

"Don't repeat what I said to any one, please; indeed I did not mean it," and she looked so very much in earnest that Genie did not like to thwart her. At the very last moment Lady Anstruther came again to see whether she could not persuade Molly to change her mind; but nothing she could say was of any avail in convincing her she would be happier waiting at home. So with a farewell kiss, her mother gave her over to Colonel Kingscote's care.

As Genie followed her sister into the carriage, there came back to her remembrance that day they had stood on the steps of the hall making their farewells, after that happy, never-to-be-forgotten visit—that visit that had, as it were, set the seal to both their lives. As she thought of Molly's pretty little good-bye speeches, and Rex Burnaby's laugh-

ing replies, and then glanced at the white, still face by her side, she realised more fully than she had ever done before, that the old, wild, sweet, laughter-loving Miss Molly, that she had known for so many years, had gone for ever, and she could have wept aloud at the thought.

"I think I had better take Molly," said Colonel Kingscote, as he opened the carriage-door. "Here, Arthur, you keep by Miss Anstruther." He drew, as he spoke, Molly's unresisting hand through his arm, and led her into the great court-house.

She never looked up; and, indeed, so absorbed was her mind, that she scarcely knew where she was, which was a matter of some relief to Colonel Kingscote, till they entered a small room, and he had closed the door behind him, when she gave one glance around. She found herself in a little room, alone save for those who had brought her, which was in itself a relief, for it gave her time to rest a minute, and try to overcome the faint feeling that was overpowering her. Colonel Kingscote placed her in the only arm-chair the room contained, and then opened the window to let in what slight breeze there was.

"Now, Molly," he said, "lift up your veil, for it is so very hot."

From her great quietness, Colonel Kingscote feared she was feeling faint. Molly obeyed.

"Genie," said Colonel Kingscote, feeling it was useless to try and explain anything to her sister, "you two must stay here—it will be quiet for you; and I will come back and tell you what you had better do in a little while."

With a look of thankful relief, Genie nodded assent. She had implicit confidence in Colonel Kingscote, and she still had a sort of half hope that he would save them that terrible scene that they had come prepared to see.

With a warning glance at Genie not to disturb her sister, who had once more relapsed into a contemplation of the blue sky outside, and who appeared to be far away from them in a quiet sort of dream, Colonel Kingscote and Arthur opened the door, and disappearing, closed it softly behind them.

Some time elapsed before there was a sound to break the intense stillness. The sisters never once spoke. Only the clock, ticking loudly and clearly in the silence, echoed through the room, seeming as though it were in a hurry to run its course, and reach that eternity which will require nothing to bid us remember that time flies.

Outside there were the manifold sights and sounds that always characterise London and its neighbourhood at any time of the day or night; but inside there was nothing but the never-varying ticking of the clock. At last the door was again

opened, and Colonel Kingscote came in, "Genie," he said, going up to her side and taking her hand in his, "I am quite decided now that it will never do for *her*," with a glance at Molly, "to be there—it will impress things on her mind that otherwise she would never hear, or at least take in, even if she did. At all costs you must prevent her."

At the sound of their voices, lowered though they were to a whisper, Molly looked round—"What is it?" she asked.

"Listen, Molly," replied Colonel Kingscote, "you must obey me in this. I do not think it would be right or kind of me to let you go into court. Believe me, that if I thought for an instant it would be a relief to you, I would not prevent it. But I am quite sure you would some day regret it very much."

"Very well," said Molly, passively, "I will do what you think best."

Something of what Colonel Kingscote had been saying to Genie had flashed through her own tired brain, as she had sat contemplating the summer sky, and she felt now only a wish to avert *that* for which she had longed so ardently.

"Only one thing," she said, stretching out her hand, and laying it on Colonel Kingscote's arm, while she spoke in a low, trembling voice—

"Will you come and fetch us before the verdict

is given? I will not even ask to go in; but I should just like to stand by the door, so as to hear it at once. Will you come for me?"

Colonel Kingscote nodded. He could not quite trust his voice to speak, and he did not want to agitate Molly more by letting her hear how it shook.

Another long waiting—a pause in which Genie seemed to live years. Every now and then she rose and opened the door, and looked out, longing, yet dreading, to catch a glimpse of Colonel Kingscote's tall form. But whether she sat still or moved restlessly about the room, Molly never looked round, or showed the least interest in anything—not even when Genie, who could bear the stillness no longer, went out, closing the door behind her, determining to wait outside. It almost seemed as if the spirit of the restless, excitable Miss Molly of old times had passed into her quieter sister.

At last, after what seemed hours, and was not indeed far short of it, Genie caught a glimpse of the well-loved figure she was watching so eagerly for. On catching sight of her he sprang hastily forward to reach her side.

"We must get Molly quick—at least, if I really must keep my promise, and take her. I don't know, even now, if we shall be in time to hear the

verdict given, but I could not get here before. A woman by me fainted, and I had to help her out; so I do not know if we shall be there soon enough —especially as I put off coming till the last moment, determining she should rather be too late than too early."

As he finished speaking, he turned the handle of the door and entered.

In an instant Molly stood up and looked round. "I am ready," she said, quietly; but even as she spoke she turned white to her very lips.

"You had better wait," said Colonel Kingscote, anxiously—"indeed you had better;" but Molly shook her head impatiently, and took Colonel Kingscote's arm, shivering all over as she did so.

"It is not because I am not fit to go," she said, pleadingly; "it is only that I am so dreadfully frightened."

Colonel Kingscote, glancing down into the soft, dark eyes upraised to his, read there the terror of which she spoke, and in a second guessed its cause. Standing still, he bent down and whispered low into her ear—so low, that even Genie, standing by, never heard—words to allay the undefined terror that he felt was lying at her heart, and that he was sure had, at that moment, taken form.

"You need not be afraid of *that*," he whispered; "it is the clearest case of manslaughter;" and at

his words, the faintest, faintest shadow of hope came into Miss Molly's sweet eyes as she turned to follow her sister.

Directly Colonel Kingscote reached the door of the court by which he had determined to enter, he knew, by the talking and confusion that was going on inside, that the verdict was given, and that the trial was over; only just over, however, for the prisoner still stood in the dock.

His first thought was to get the Anstruthers away; but the little passage by which he had entered was by this time so full of people, that he found his intention by no means easy of fulfilment.

While they were standing thus, a few words were borne to his ear, as also to that of the frightened girl clinging to him—a few words passing between two men, the one seated close beside him, and the other in the doorway behind, that he was trying to reach.

"I say, John," called the man from the doorway, "how many years has he got?"

"Five," answered his friend, with a chuckle. "And I'm right down glad on it. As a rule, these swells always gets off far too easy."

Long before his sentence was concluded, a piercing scream rang through the building—a scream that echoed in the ears of some of the people as-

sembled there for many a long day. There was much excitement to see who had given that loud and exceeding bitter cry; but long before a careless, questioning eye could be turned upon poor Miss Molly, Colonel Kingscote had caught her up in his arms, and forced a passage for himself and her through the crowd. Genie, for the moment left behind alone, for Arthur had been parted from her, saw the prisoner start forward and look anxiously over the crowd, as if searching for some one, with a more excited look on his face than it had worn all during the trial; and there were not wanting people to remark it.

"It is the girl he was going to marry," some one said close by Genie, glancing up at her as she spoke; "poor young thing!"

"Why do you pity her?" said a harsh woman's voice—so harsh, that Genie involuntarily turned to look at the speaker.

"Why do I pity her?" repeated the one who had first spoken—"why, because she is so young and pretty, and they were to have been married so soon; and now——" and the woman broke off with tears in her eyes. "Who are you, then," she went on after a moment's pause, "that you cannot feel for her?"

"You wish to know who *I* am? Well, then,

I was Lawrence White's mother. You speak pityingly of them; then what do you think of *me*, for *he* is dead?"

Despite the woman's harsh voice, and wild, reckless face, there was something in the very majesty of her sorrow that silenced her neighbour; and Genie, with a shudder at the glimpse she had had of that other wrecked and saddened life, turned with an aching heart to follow Colonel Kingscote.

CHAPTER XVII.

HALF BROKEN-HEARTED.

"We are so tired,
My heart and I."
—MRS BROWNING.

FOR hours after Molly had returned home and had been put into her bed, she remained so motionless that Lady Anstruther thought she must have fallen asleep; and at last she crept noiselessly towards her, to see if such were the case; but no—one glance at the wide-opened eyes convinced her that no such relief was at hand. She was moving away again as quietly as she had come, when Molly spoke.

"Mother."

"Yes, dear, what is it?"

"Only that I want you to promise I may see him once more to say good-bye. You have done so much for me already, you will arrange that, will you not?"

"Certainly, if it is at all possible."

"But it must be made possible!" exclaimed Molly, more energetically. "Think of it, mother darling—think of what it is!" and Molly shut her eyes, as though she were looking on some terrible picture which she would fain forget.

"You know, Molly, I will do my best. I will ask Colonel Kingscote this very evening; I am sure he will arrange it for you."

"Mother," questioned Molly, after a few minutes' silence, "is Genie going to marry Cecil Kingscote?"

"Yes, dear."

"I thought so," Molly replied; and then she added in a low voice, as though she were speaking to herself, "How happy some people are!"

Then seeing the sorrowful look in the kind eyes that were bent on hers, she went on: "Not that I am complaining for myself, you understand, because I have always been most perfectly happy till now. But this dreadful trouble," with a sad smile, "seems to have made me forget that I was ever happy before."

So true it is that stormy hours are remembered long after days on which the sun rose, with never a cloud to dull its glory from cradle to grave, are forgotten as though they had never been.

"Five years!" she said presently, with a little shiver. "Oh, mother, it is a lifetime, is it not? How can I ever live through it?"

What answer could her mother make but stoop and kiss her, as that sad cry was wrung from her.

Deep down in her own heart, almost unknown even to herself, one thought was often present with Lady Anstruther, and that was, that though Molly was heartbroken and sad beyond all comforting *now*, still as her constancy had so often been tried and found wanting, it was not altogether unlikely such might be the case again; and as she had just said five years was a lifetime, at least it would seem so to *her*. Consequently her mother looked forward with a half hope to the time when Rex Burnaby, with all his sins and sorrows, should have passed out of her life for ever; when she might wake as from a dream, to remember nothing of these terrible days, saving only that a black shadow had once fallen across her sunshiny path: remembering also the wonderful power of time, the healer, she trusted it might not be so very long before this awakening came; in the meantime she could not find it in her heart to say a single hard word of the author of all this woe in her daughter's presence; she could not, in very pity, do aught save attempt to soothe and comfort her.

"Mother," again questioned Molly, "have you had any news of the children lately? I never seem to have heard a word of them for so long, I am afraid I am growing horribly selfish; I am

ashamed to say it, but I really had quite forgotten all about them."

"They are all quite well. Miss Foster is very kind to them, and takes great care of them; but I have no doubt they will be glad to see us all back again."

Molly shuddered when she remembered what would have happened when they were all back again; but she said nothing aloud, save, "Give them all my love when you write. And Colonel Kingscote, mother, when does he go to the Crimea?"

"In a fortnight."

"Oh, mother," said Molly suddenly, in a quick, gasping voice, stretching out her hand and clasping Lady Anstruther's—"oh, mother, poor Rex!" as though that were the first time she had fully realised all he was about to lose. It was the first time, also, she had spoken his name, and her mother looked up at the sound of her voice, with the ready sympathy that had filled her eyes with tears at those sad words, as though hoping she would say something more; but Molly turned her head away, and would not speak again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIS HEART WAS DARKENED WITH HER SHADOW.

"But still her lips refused to send 'Farewell;'
For in that word—that fatal word—howe'er
We promise, hope, believe, there breathes despair.'
—BYRON.

AY de mi! last days will come, last farewells must be said, last kisses given some time, put the time off as we may; and if it were not for this sad fact, there are some among us who would forget that this world is not the one where our joys and sorrows should be centred, would forget that it is merely the stepping-stone over the brook which flows by the shore of eternity. And so the day had come when Molly was to go and say her farewell words to the man who had come and stolen from her her heart's love, and who had now to leave her desolate, taking that heart's love away with him. Perhaps bitterer to him than the five awful years that lay before him was the thought that it was so—that there was nothing

now he could do, or leave undone, that would give back to Miss Molly the light, happy heart he had won. And she? Ah, feel for her! Think of seeing the one we love best on earth so sinning, and so suffering! To hear his name in every mouth—*his* name, that she could never hear without the colour mounting to her cheek with the remembrance that it was to have been *hers*—*his* name, spoken in tones of shame, of execration, or of pity, but never again as of one honoured amongst men. To feel that in all the years to come, though the valleys might be full of corn, and the earth smile with the time of plenty, that had come for others, yet for *her*, like Ruth of old, the sheaves were not, but only such stray ears as she could glean, with no loved voice to aid her in her task. Ah! pity her, I say; for, after all, the evil was not of her doing—she only shared the suffering, not the sin; and "many waters cannot quench love."

The afternoon that had been agreed on for Molly to go down to Guildford, was the same as that on which Winifred had been to say good-bye to her brother. Poor Winifred, who always strove so hard to do the right, and who yet always seemed to do the wrong thing—she had come up to town the evening before, not liking to leave her father, who was still very ill, for a longer time; she had refused Arthur's earnest request to spend the night under

his roof, and then she had regretted it ever since, for the refusal had only widened the breach that already lay between them—and was this a time to widen any breach? But she had said "No," and had taken a room at an hotel, where she was all alone, save for her maid, and it was too late to repent now. Even Molly she kept aloof from; for she reminded her of the great fact that one of her own name had brought disgrace on his house and family; and so even from poor, broken-hearted Miss Molly she kept away. She had gone to her brother: she had tried hard to prevent him seeing a shade of difference in her manner; she would not for anything have had him feel in his trouble that his own sister was one to forget the bonds of affection that had so long knit them together. But Reginald was not to be deceived; he knew that all the time she was only trying to do her duty—that never again would they be as they had been—that between them would always lie this past four months, and the five years that were coming. He felt that while she was speaking to him, she was trying to forget that the man before her was a murderer, and that his name had rung through the length and breadth of England as such: and he felt also, that the trial was unsuccessful; and though he knew it was only natural, still it gave him many a bitter thought, both at the time and afterwards. He said nothing,

however; never by word or look did he hint to her that he missed any of her former affection—never by word or look did he hint that mercy should be dealt to the sinning; only a short time afterwards, when the door was again opened to admit another visitor, the last one who was to afford him a backward glance at the life he was leaving—when Miss Molly stood in the doorway, looking at him with tearful eyes, round which much sorrow was leaving darker shadows than should have been there—he felt his heart bound with wild joy and sorrow at the thought of the love he had won and was leaving behind him.

"Molly!" he cried—"dear Molly!"

But Molly did not this time hasten to the protection of his sheltering arms. No; this time the remembrance that never again would they thus meet—never again for years to come look upon one another's faces—seemed to deprive her of all power.

For a minute she stood thus, silently gazing at him, as he stood opposite with folded arms, gazing at her.

Afterwards she could always recall at will the tall figure of Reginald Burnaby standing, in all the pride of his strength and manhood, in that little prison cell, with his dark, sorrowful eyes looking into hers.

Then suddenly the horror of it was too much for her; with a despairing cry she threw herself down into the only chair that the room contained, and burst into wild and bitter weeping.

Captain Burnaby had never seen her cry since that day when she had shed those few happy tears in the Brook garden, when he had asked her to be his wife; but April showers are not more unlike December storms than that day's tears were to this passion of weeping.

Rex knelt down beside her, and earnestly implored her to be comforted; but it was long before her sobs came slower, and longer still before she looked up with undimmed eyes. "Five years," was all she could say then—"five years, Rex!" They were the words that had rung in her ears night and day, ever since she had heard them first.

"Who on earth took you there, Miss Molly?" he said, stroking back the hair from her aching forehead as he spoke—"who had the heart to do it?"

"It was my own fault, Rex; I begged of them so to let me go. But how did you know I was there? did you see me?"

"No, dear, I did not *see* you."

Molly asked no more. She herself had no remembrance of that wild cry that Rex had heard,

and which he sometimes wondered if he should ever forget.

"Now, Miss Molly," he went on, "don't cry any more, my dear, for I cannot bear it. Let us remember that though this *is* good-bye for evermore, as far as this world is concerned, yet I trust—and I am sure you do—that some day we shall meet again."

"But why not in this world?" exclaimed Molly, starting up and lifting her head from his shoulder, —"why not? Although five years seem such an eternity now, still, Rex, it must come to an end some time. Then why do you kill the little hope I have, by speaking as if we should never meet again?"

"I will tell you why, child. But first stand up, and, for one short moment, let me look at you, and kiss you as if we had never known these last months."

She stood up as he told her, and he took her in his arms, and kissed her cheek and brow and lips, till a faint shadow of colour was called up, even into her white face, at the passion of his caresses.

"Now, Molly," he said, unclasping her hands, and putting her at a little distance from him, "that is the last time I shall ever kiss you as my promised wife—the last time, whatever it may cost me, that I shall ever, if I know myself, speak of you, or to you, except as I would to any other friend.

For the future we must remember what lies between us,—we must remember that the convict and Sir Geoffrey Anstruther's daughter have nothing in common—that my black soul must have no communication with you, my sweet Miss Molly."

His voice lingered tenderly over the accents of her name, as though unwilling to bid it, with the other happy things of this life, farewell.

There was a strength always about Reginald Burnaby, whether in his deeds or in his words, that involuntarily awed his hearers into an obedience to what they felt to be a superior will; and that feeling kept Miss Molly quiet for the moment. But as she took in what it was he was telling her, that for the future they were indeed apart—that even the gift of waiting was to be denied her—then all her other troubles appeared light in comparison; but she steadied her voice, and said quietly enough—

"Did my mother ask this of you?"

"No, Molly; I told Lady Anstruther of my intention. I told her that when we parted here it would be a parting, not for years, but for ever—that no shadow from my dark future should be cast across your path; and here, Molly, I keep my word."

"And she said?" Molly asked, gently; but her trembling lips betrayed her eagerness.

"She said she thought it was best. So there, Miss Molly"—and he stood with folded arms and looked at her. "I give you back your freedom. Free you are, now, as on the first day I saw you."

"But I am *not* free," interrupted Molly, passionately. "I am not free, and you know it. What is the use of giving the prisoner his freedom when he has learnt to love his captor? Is it because it is such a useless gift that you offer it? Don't you care?" she went on, the ready tears filling her eyes again; "is it nothing to you?"

"Nothing to me, Molly!" he echoed; and there was something in his voice that quieted Molly, at least outwardly. "Not care, Molly! Do you think I would not — ay, and gladly too — buy back your freedom with my life?"

She made no answer. There is a time when there is too great a desolation to be put into words— when despair is too deep for sighs or tears; and so it was now.

Clearly Molly saw rising up between them a great partition: it was but a few feet high now —the foundation-stones were only just laid; but none the less clearly did she see a time coming when the few bricks, which a child might now throw down, should be a great wall dividing them for ever.

Still and silent she stood there watching him—

watching him as he threw himself down in the chair, covering his face with his hands. She knew now, and had really known all along, that this that he had done—this severing of their future —was to him worse, if possible, than to herself; for was he not giving up, or having everything taken away from *him?* Still, so much accustomed had she become to bow her will to his, that no doubts came to her as to whether this additional trial was needful, quite assured was she that he would never have thus added to her sorrows if it had not been so.

But still, for all that, there was not much to say. Comfort there was none to offer. She could not bid him look to the past for consolation, or to the future and take courage; for what hope was there for him in the future? And so, as I said before, she stood there looking at him, looking at the bowed head, and sad, sorrowful aspect; and thinking of the years of toil that were before him, she could feel nothing but great unutterable pity—pity which swallowed up every other feeling, and made her determine that nothing he should command, however hard its fulfilment might be, should be left undone.

And so at last she moved over to his side and laid her hand softly and caressingly on his shoulder, and without a tremble in her voice—

"Rex," she said.

"Well," but he never looked up.

"Rex, what is it you wish me to do or to agree to?" and the quiet voice falling on Reginald Burnaby's ear deceived him.

He was glad that there were no more tears—they only made it so much the more difficult for him to say what he had to say; he felt that it was better so, and never guessed at the battle that had been fought and won in those few minutes whilst Molly had stood looking at him.

She repeated her question once more, as he did not answer, and this time he spoke, though still without looking up.

"Take your hand off me, child; I cannot say it whilst I feel you touching me."

Once, twice she passed her hand slowly and caressingly over the dark head bent beneath her, and then she stooped and pressed one soft little kiss upon it.

That Rex felt the kiss she knew by the shiver he gave—but by outward word or motion he gave no sign that he was aware of it; and then, with both hands lightly clasped together, she stood waiting till he should speak.

At last he lifted himself up and looked her full in the face, but Miss Molly was almost startled out of her enforced calm by the change in his eyes.

They had a look of agony in them, as those of a man might have who had seen some dreadful horror, which he knew was slowly but surely coming to him.

"Give me back the ring," he said, in a voice that was not quite as steady as he tried to make it appear. "Give me back the ring, and remember nothing, save that without it you are free—free to start afresh in the world, and carve out a new future for yourself;" and then with a glance at the white face above him, he added, with a bitter laugh, "You don't seem to rejoice in your liberation yet; but the time will come," he went on, more gently, "when you will thank me for this day's work."

There is something in nearly every man that prompts him to say hard cruel things to those he loves best. Perhaps it is because they feel so sure of the affection they have won—so sure, that nothing they can say or do can estrange that affection—that makes them so cruelly unjust at times.

"Do you doubt my love?" asked Molly; and then, touched by the question, Burnaby replied hastily, "No, of course not—not now, dear. Who could have seen you go through what I have seen, and doubt it?—But still I think it best."

"*If* you think it best," she repeated—and without another minute's hesitation she drew off the

ring that had been placed so lovingly on her finger by him only five months before, and held it out towards him.

He stretched out his hand, but before he could touch it, she drew it quickly back, and kissed it once or twice, for the love's sake that had given it, and then she made no further resistance to his possessing himself of it.

He took his watch out of his pocket, and detaching the chain, slipped the ring into its place; and then a sudden thought seemed to seize him, and he stopped short.

"Give me your little chain," he said.

Molly unfastened it—it was a small gold chain she usually wore round her neck—and gave it to him. He passed it through the ring—the opal ring that had filled Molly with superstitious awe the night he had given it to her—and put it in his pocket.

"I will leave it back to you, Molly, in my will; or give it to you when you come and ask me for it."

Molly's eyes filled with tears, but she let no word pass her lips. There was the sound of the door opening. Putting her on one side, Reginald walked over to it. He said a few words to the jailer, who replied, "Yes, there is a gentleman waiting for the lady."

"Well, please give my message;" and then he strode back to Molly's side.

"In five minutes that man will knock at the door and unlock it; when he does so, you are to go. Do you understand these are the last five minutes?"

Then Molly's fortitude almost gave way again, only that Rex had resumed his former desponding attitude, and Molly, standing by his chair, could not stop to think of herself, for trying to comfort him.

"Rex," she said, softly—she did not try to touch him this time,—"Rex, I cannot say good-bye like this. I *cannot* forget. Look up, please, Rex."

But Rex made no reply.

"Rex," said the soft voice again, "have some pity on me; think of what we *have* been. You tell me not to look forward, and I obey you; but I cannot—indeed I cannot—forget the past!"

Then he looked up, and spoke almost fiercely.

"For heaven's sake, don't remind me of that! I thought, when Cecil Kingscote came to me and said good-bye, and told me he was under orders for the Crimea—I thought then life could hold no bitterer moments for me; but I find I was mistaken."

"Don't, Rex—don't speak like that. I did not mean any blame," she went on, anxiously; "you did not think that?"

"Forgive me, Molly, but I verily believe I am mad. I am certain that I do not know what I am saying. All I am clear about is this, that we are to part friends, and nothing more; and I," he added in a lower tone—"I have such difficulty in remembering it."

"But why should it be so?" asked Molly, moving a step nearer, and speaking more eagerly.

"Why, child? Because I am older than you, and I know it will be best; and bad as I am, I am determined that never in the after-years shall you be able to say, or even think, I tried to take advantage of your youth and innocence," and, after a moment's hesitation, "your love for me;" and Molly felt it would be hopeless trying to combat his decree.

And even while these thoughts passed through her brain, a knock was heard at the door. If it were possible for any one so white as Molly was to turn a shade whiter, she did so then; she had not a shadow of colour anywhere now, not even in her lips.

"Go," said Rex, stretching out his hand, but without one upward glance—"go; I asked Cecil to leave you five minutes longer, and he agreed. The five minutes are up; you will not find the door locked."

"And you *will* not say good-bye?"

"I cannot."

That was the first symptom of weakness Reginald Burnaby had shown that day, and Molly was not slow to take advantage of it.

Once more coming close up to him, she laid her hand on his, and he did not attempt this time to remove it, although he did not take it.

As she made those few steps closer to his side, she saw lying on the floor at her feet a broken sixpence that he always wore on his chain. She stooped and picked it up.

"I have found your little charm, Rex," she said, softly; "it must have dropped off your watch-chain just now. I shall keep it, and only give it to you back on the day when I come to ask you for my ring."

"I hope it will bring you better luck than it has me. But go, child; it is quite time you went."

He looked up to say that, and then buried his face in his hands again. To see her fulfil his command, and go, was more than even his strength was equal to.

Then Molly stooped just once, and for one moment laid her soft cheek against his, and whispered, "Good-bye, Rex—darling Rex, good-bye," and turned to go. She reached the door; her hand was on the lock ere she looked round; but there her courage failed her—without one word she *could* not go.

She flew back, and threw herself down on her knees beside him, and implored him, for the sake of what they had been to one another, to say good-bye, as he would have done to her four months ago. But he resisted her pleadings; all he did was to lift her to her feet, and there to bid "God bless her" in a voice that shook so he could hardly speak; and when Molly looked up into the dark eyes she loved so well, she saw they were full of tears.

The sight of his suffering reminded her how she had determined to be brave for his sake, and to try and trust in his judgment of what was best; so she quietly turned back to the door, only repeating first, penitently, as she stooped and kissed the hand that had raised her, "Good-bye, darling Rex."

He waited till she was beyond the reach of his outstretched arm, even if he had wished to detain her, and then he repeated softly, tenderly, words which might have been addressed to himself, or might have been meant as some slight, last farewell to the girl whose happy youth he had turned into such bitter mourning, and who was leaving him now for ever—the name which to them both called up such tender memories — "Sweet Miss Molly!"

CHAPTER XIX.

COMFORT HER, COMFORT HER.

"Ah, 'tis dreary listening ever,
For the voice that cometh never."

THERE is a relief, after long suspense, in certainty, however awful the certainty may be. Most of those who had been waiting for the result of Captain Burnaby's trial certainly found it so.

To all there came a feeling of rest, excepting to Rex working out his terrible sentence, far away from all who knew and loved him,—and to Molly at home, lying dangerously ill of fever; for the strain had proved too much for her, and the overwrought brain had at length given way, as Colonel Kingscote had always feared it would; and there were days and nights when Lady Anstruther and Genie, leaning over her bed, began to fear that Molly's joys and sorrows would soon alike be ended, and the land where there is no trouble or sighing be reached. But her youth and good constitution

stood her in good stead; and when the hot August days had passed away, and the first bright September days came, she lay on her bed, white indeed, and fragile-looking as any Easter lily, but still with a feeling at her own heart that her time of rest had not come yet. Day by day, after that, she crept back into life — crept back slowly, as though one whose eyes had so nearly beheld the King in his beauty, in the land that is very far off, was returning unwillingly to this work-a-day world of ours.

As she regained her strength, and memory returned of the weary days that had preceded her illness, there was much that she had to ask Genie, much for Genie to tell her. Colonel Kingscote and Hubert were in the Crimea; and their letters home were the principal excitements in the family. Colonel Kingscote's letters were just like himself, pleasant and kind, and full of news, with little veins of drollery and tenderness running through them, that made them inexpressibly dear to Genie, and even brought smiles to Miss Molly's lips, all unaccustomed as they had been to smiling.

Old Sir Arthur Burnaby was dead—killed, as Arthur would sometimes declare to Janet, by him; and not all Janet's attempts at consolation prevented his mind continually dwelling on that one idea. Before the old man died, he had sent for his

son and his wife, and had forgiven them the cruel deception they had practised on him; and then he had bidden Arthur seek out his brother, and take his father's blessing to him—"And do not let him think, Arthur, that I felt hard or uncharitable towards him at the last. It was just at first that I could not bear that one of our name should be——" there Sir Arthur broke down. "But I see it all clearer now," he went on—"tell him so, Arthur; with my love tell him I have forgiven him all the grief he has caused me as entirely as I hope to be forgiven myself, and that I pray night and day God may pardon him also."

And it was not so very long after, that a time came when it was seen that the shutters of Aston Manor were closed, and then it was whispered abroad that the old master was dead.

And amongst the mourners who followed Sir Arthur to his grave there were many who shed bitter tears, while standing there listening to those last solemn words, at the thought of the poor old man dying in the midst of the dreadful grief that had fallen upon his family; and mothers kissed their own curly-headed boys when they returned home, and breathed a prayer over them that they might not cause them such sore trouble in the future as the master's had done to him. After that, it began to be said that the young Sir Arthur

and his wife were going abroad to travel for a year, before settling down at the Manor; and there was much gossip to be heard everywhere on the subject, until Sir Arthur came down himself and saw his tenants, and told them such was his intention, but that in the meantime he hoped his steward would take care of their interests and of his; and that when, his health being quite recovered, as he hoped it would be after a winter spent in Italy, he returned to his own place, they would all get on as well and happily together as they had done in his dear old father's time.

Then there was much cheering for Sir Arthur and his wife, and the men dispersed to their own homes, and gradually the sad story that had taken place in their midst was forgotten amid the many toils and cares of this life. But there were not wanting some to mourn occasionally, in the dark winter days, for the happy time, gone never to return; and mothers, sitting darning husbands' and children's socks by blazing hearths, would whisper to one another, with tearful, questioning eyes, "What had become of the poor young thing who had stayed at the Manor, and who was to have married *him?*" And Rex's name was not forgotten; he had not passed away so completely from the memory of man as he sometimes hoped he had done; for there were many in that dark winter

weather, more especially as Christmas time drew near, and the great house which had always shown hospitality then to rich and poor alike remained shut up and silent—then many a one wondered, below his breath, how poor "Master Reginald" was; and honest farmers and tenants said they would give everything they possessed to hear once more the sound of his cheery voice and merry boyish laugh among them. Christmas did not seem Christmas somehow without him.

And little by little, as Molly cared to hear, Genie told her these things about Sir Arthur, and Hubert, and Colonel Kingscote; and Molly listened eagerly. "And what is Winifred doing?" she asked; "is she going to live with Arthur and Janet?"

"No, she has refused; she is going to live with an aunt, Mrs Burnett, a sister of her mother's, in London."

"Poor foolish Winifred!" said Molly, softly. "Have you seen her, Genie?"

"No, but I hope to in the spring; she has written to me once or twice."

And so the time wore on towards Christmas, and still Molly had not gained sufficient strength to leave the house.

"She wants rousing," said Lady Anstruther to Mrs Kingscote, who had driven over to see her—"I

am sure she does; but it is difficult to persuade her yet that life holds anything worth the effort of rousing herself for. Of course, as she gets stronger, she will be more hopeful; but at present, I must confess, it is difficult to know exactly what to do for her without appearing hard."

"Will you let her come and stay with me?"

"I should be delighted, dear Mrs Kingscote, if you can persuade her to agree to it."

How Mrs Kingscote managed, was a secret she never let out; but anyhow she accomplished her wish, and made Molly promise to try and get up her strength sufficiently to pay her a long visit directly after Christmas, which was now close at hand.

"Good-bye, Genie," said Mrs Kingscote, kissing her as she left the house—"good-bye. I have not asked you to come with Molly, because I have an idea that she will be better quite alone with me, who will remind her of none of the dreadful part of her life. It will break off all associations with that time for a bit. Don't you think it is best?"

"Yes, indeed," said Genie; "only you, and one other, would ever have been so thoughtful and kind;" and then Mrs Kingscote kissed her once more for absent Cecil's sake.

CHAPTER XX.

VIOLETS

"In aught that tries the heart, how few withstand the proof!"
—*Childe Harold.*

It was Christmas eve — a Christmas eve most unlike in every way that day last year; a damp, raw day, with a sort of fog falling, which penetrated everything and everybody; a miserable day for the time of year,—and the children were loud in their expressions of disappointment that the fortnight's holiday, which they had intended to spend in skating, should be thus wasted.

Molly, lying on a sofa in the schoolroom, rather felt for the children; at any rate, she felt for that part of their affliction which prevented them going out, as they were not by any means those proverbial children who are seen but not heard.

"Do you think," exclaimed May, the elder of the two little girls, a child of about eight, flattening her small nose against the window-pane,—"do you think, Miss Molly, it will freeze to-night?"

"Not in the least likely, I should say," replied Molly, with a glance out of the window at the sort of steam-bath in which the whole outside world was enveloped. "Now, May, do get something to play with; that is the fourth time I have read this page, and I don't yet know who has proposed to who in it. Where *is* Genie?"

"Out driving with mamma," replied Bill. "I say, Miss Molly, before you begin that page again, just tell us what we had better do."

"Anything you like, so long as you don't talk to me till I have finished my book."

Molly turned her back round, and with her fingers in her ears, returned to her reading; and quietly enough she read on now, till the door was opened by Genie, and then her startled exclamation of "Children, what *are* you doing?" made Molly look round.

"Oh, Bill," cried Genie, "how cruel of you!" There, in the centre of the room, stood Molly's little Skye terrier Gip, forcibly held still by the two girls, while Bill was engaged in painting his body in broad green and red stripes with some paint that had been got to renovate garden-chairs.

"Well," said Bill, defiantly, "I don't see anything cruel in it. You like it, don't you, Gip?"

Poor patient Gip wagged his tail, and tried to look pleased: from infancy he had undergone such

curious experiments, that this was only one amongst many others; and with the magnanimity of a dog who had suffered greatly, and was too large-minded to retaliate, he tried with all his might to appear as if he liked it as he glanced up at Genie. But Molly was not so forgiving.

"It is very unkind of you, Bill—indeed it is. And how you, May and Lily, could sit and look on without telling me what Bill was doing, I cannot think."

"But really, Miss Molly," said Lily, penitently, "you told us we might do anything we liked if we did not speak to you; and I did not think Gip would mind."

"Well, never mind now," interposed Genie; "pick the wretched creature up, Bill, and take him to John, and ask him to try and get it off;" and then, as Bill, nothing loath, proceeded to make preparations to lift the mass of green and red paint into his arms, Genie sprang forward.

"Are you mad?" she exclaimed, angrily; and then, angry as she was, she could not help laughing, the sight was so truly ludicrous—"here, wrap it up in a newspaper first. And now, children, clear away all this mess, and go into the nursery, for I want to speak to Molly." Directly the door had shut upon them, Genie came over, and stood by her sister's side.

"I am sorry you have been so bothered with the children, Molly; but though they make me angry, I can't help feeling sorry for them. It *is* dull for them."

"Yes, Genie. I don't mean to be cross, only it seems to me as if I could not keep my temper over anything."

"That is only because you are ill," said Genie, soothingly; "don't fret about it," as she saw the sad look she had learnt to know of late coming into Molly's eyes.

She stood quite quietly by the sofa for a minute or two, until Molly looked up, and catching a certain questioning look in her eyes, said excitedly, "You have something to tell me, Genie; what is it? not bad news?"

"Oh no," replied her sister, hastily; and then seeing that Molly's mind was already rushing on to all sorts of probable and improbable things, she hastened to say, "it is only that some one has called while we were out, who wants to see you."

A faint tinge of pink mounted to Molly's white cheeks as her sister spoke, and then as quickly died away as she remembered how impossible it was for the some one whom she would care to see to come to her; and with a sigh she brought her spirit back from dreamland to earth again, and asked—"Well, who is it?"

"It is Mr Winwick," replied Genie; "he has volunteered for the Crimea, and is going out almost immediately; he came here to ask if we had anything we should like to send out by him, and then he most earnestly begged me to persuade you to see him before he left—will you, Miss Molly?"

"Oh, but I cannot!" exclaimed Molly—and her cheeks were crimson enough now; "you know——" and then remembering Genie did not know, she checked herself, and said, "If he wishes it, you may bring him up—that is to say, if he does not mind coming here, for I do not feel well enough to go down."

Genie went on her errand; and Molly in the meantime, whilst waiting the sound of their voices on the stairs, gave herself up to thought, as to what she should say to him. But no such warning was given; not a sound did she hear till there was a low knock at the door, and on calling out "Come in," Mr Winwick entered.

Very angry did Miss Molly feel with Genie at that moment, which Genie, sitting down-stairs, guessed would be the case; but for all Miss Molly's anger, she had not been able to resist Mr Winwick's pleading voice when he said, "I have come all this way to say good-bye to her; do try and persuade her to see me;" and so Genie had concocted that little plan which had succeeded so well, only

saying to Mr Winwick, when she showed him the schoolroom door, "You must remember, Mr Winwick, she has been very ill;" and then she considered she had quite done her duty to them both.

"How do you do, Miss Anstruther?" he said, gently, going over to her side. "I have come to ask you whether you have sufficiently forgiven me my sins the last time we met to give me your hand, and wish me good luck in the Crimea."

"Yes, Mr Winwick," said Molly, just touching his hand with hers, "I have quite forgiven you *now*;" and then remembering when the last time was, and who had come home and found her asleep after that eventful afternoon, her eyes slowly filled with tears.

Never for one instant did a shadow of mistake pass through Mr Winwick's brain now, as to whether Miss Molly cared for him. He had heard nearly all her sad story, and guessing the rest, he was able to understand what brought the tears; and understanding that, and being a good, honourable man, and loving her very dearly, he looked back with even greater sorrow and repentance to that day which seemed so long ago now, and the remembrance only of which made her shrink away from his touch, and look around the room as she was looking now, in a vain, wild sort of way, as if to see if there were not a chance of escape.

There was a silence whilst Molly was trying furtively to brush the tears out of her eyes, and Mr Winwick was thinking of the best way of saying something that he had now fully made up his mind to say.

"Miss Molly," he began, presently, "did you ever hear Captain Burnaby and I knew each other?"

The question was asked very abruptly, at the last, despite all his thoughts as to how he should put it; and that, added to hearing a name that had never been spoken in her presence for months, so startled Molly that her colour faded away entirely, and left her face deadly white.

"Yes, I knew it," at last she said. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because I am going to try and see him to say good-bye to him, before I leave this country; and, if you are willing, I will take a message from you."

He never looked at her while he spoke from the beginning to the end of that sentence. At the commencement of it he had walked to the window, and while gazing at the dreary fog outside he had spoken; and for a few minutes afterwards he did not look round. For these few minutes she made no answer to his question; and then she rose from the sofa, and walked with quick, uncertain feet to his side, and laid her trembling hand on his arm.

"Oh, thank you—thank you," she said, in her low, sweet voice, looking up through her tears into his face. "I will never forget your kindness—never."

If the struggle had been great to say what he had said—and none save himself knew what it had been—in that moment he felt he was rewarded; felt that though she might never say a kind word to him again, yet that those few moments were worth the sacrifice of self he had made since he had entered the room—a sacrifice unknown and unguessed at even by the woman at his side.

"What is your message?" he said, kindly, looking down into her dark eyes. Molly returned to her seat on the sofa, and sat there quite still, buried in thought; while Mr Winwick remained at the window, scarcely less thoughtful than she. Then she stretched out her hand and took the bunch of violets from the vase that stood on the table by her side—the bunch of violets which she was so rarely without, thanks to the mild weather and Scott's care, who knew Miss Molly's weakness. She took them in her hand and picked out two of the best, and then coming back to Mr Winwick's side, said in a low voice—

"I suppose I had better not send them in a letter. May I put them in your watch? They will keep there, and just show he is not forgotten; will they not?"

Mr Winwick nodded as he held the watch open for them, while she shut them up in it.

"Shall I say anything?" he asked, as he took it back.

With clasped hands Miss Molly stood thinking; and then she lifted her face to his—"Will you just say to him, *'Le regret d'un absent.'*"

"You may trust me. And now I must say good-bye; and I hope, Miss Molly, there is nothing between us now—that I am forgiven everything."

"Quite," replied Molly, happily and gratefully: and this time she did not just touch his fingers coldly; no—she laid her hand in his, and let it rest there lovingly for a full minute, while he was wishing her a long farewell.

She followed him to the door, and said in a lower voice—

"This is only between *us*, is it not? You will not tell any one but him?"

"No one but him, Miss Molly," he replied; "you may trust me fully:" and Molly felt she could. And she was so overjoyed at his kindness, that she almost forgot the love that had prompted the kindness; or if she did remember it, it was only to feel in a passing sort of way—"He was fond of me once too, so I wonder at his doing it; for love generally makes men so selfish;" and so passed by the love that had been so great that it had conquered self.

And that evening Molly was more like her own old self than she had been for many months; and once or twice Sir Geoffrey looked up, startled at the sound of her laugh, now almost a thing of the past. He spoke to Lady Anstruther about it afterwards, who said that, "Yes, certainly, she believed Molly was becoming brighter and gayer. Perhaps," she added, with a smile, "Mr Winwick's visit may have had something to do with it. She used to be very fond of him at one time, you know. Oh, I am sure," she went on, "Molly will be far better when she gets a little change—when she has something to turn her mind from the one idea, which, I feel assured, though she never speaks of it, she is always brooding over."

CHAPTER XXI.

FOND MEMORY'S CHAIN.

"Praising what is lost
Makes the remembrance dear."
—*Winter's Tale.*

DIRECTLY Christmas had come and gone, Mrs Kingscote drove over one day, and Molly, well shawled and wrapped up, was driven back to the Hall. The change in itself, as Mrs Kingscote had thought it would, did her good. The being away from all the sights and sounds that reminded her of the past—all helped to restore her mind and body to health. It was a relief in itself only being able to talk of him. By common consent the Anstruthers never so much as mentioned his name, and the having Mrs Kingscote to talk to of him by the hour together was just what she wanted. Mrs Kingscote was a capital listener; for to her Rex Burnaby was almost as dear as he was to Molly, to whom it made little difference that it was not so much for his own virtues Mrs

Kingscote loved him as for the fact that he was Cecil's greatest friend.

And so they talked and made much of their heroes together—heroes, at least, to them, though one of them had so sadly little right to the title.

"You see," one day Molly said to Mrs Kingscote, "it is a pleasure just to say his name. I cannot do so generally, for fear people should pity me—and it is not *pity* I want; they do not seem to see that it is the pity, or rather the necessity for it, that drives me mad. Oh, Mrs Kingscote," rising and stretching out her hands, "think of loving him as I do, and having to say that I would ten times rather have seen him dead in his coffin before me, than have seen what I have!" and Mrs Kingscote seemed then to realise more than she had ever done what Miss Molly had suffered, and was, if possible, kinder to her than ever.

One morning, not so many days after Molly's arrival at the Hall, a letter was given to her, redirected from her own home, the original handwriting of which was utterly strange to her. She looked at it doubtfully for a few minutes before opening it, and then carelessly broke the seal, and drawing out the letter glanced at the signature: as she saw the name at the end, the whole expression of her face changed, and with an expression of surprise she began reading as follows:—

"MY DEAR MISS MOLLY,—If I may call you so —I thought you would forgive my writing to you when you knew that the object of my so doing was merely to tell you that I have fulfilled your commission. I saw *him*, and gave him the flowers and the message. He asked me to see you, and say these words to you, 'Tell her, her *friend* thanks her.' So, as I had not time to go down into Shropshire before sailing, I determined to write. Wishing you a long farewell, and much happiness in the future, believe me always your friend, G. W.

"*P.S.*—He was looking very well."

Molly felt happier after receiving that letter than she had done for a long time. There was a great deal in the mere fact of hearing something so directly of him that cheered her immensely; and almost unknown to herself, hope was springing up again in her heart—hope, which it is so difficult to kill utterly, particularly in the young, and which is, perhaps, the first best gift of heaven to erring mortals. And from that day forward she gradually improved in health; and when, a fortnight afterwards, she returned home, Lady Anstruther could scarcely believe she was the same sad invalid who had left them; and she thanked Mrs Kingscote, with tears in her eyes, for having brought the roses back to

Molly's cheeks. In her own heart she put the change partly down to Mr Winwick's opportune appearance—not that Molly had ever spoken of him, or in any way shown any interest in him since his visit: but then Lady Anstruther had never said a word to her to invite confidence on the subject; perhaps she dreaded destroying her fairy fabric by one remorseless stroke—her fabric that, if once pulled down now, she felt certain she could never build up again. She was irritable at times, not quite so sweet-tempered as in the days before her trial came; but her mother and sister bore gently and lovingly with her, feeling sure that the little occasional fretfulness was but the outward mark of the terrible furnace of affliction she had passed through, and that with recovered health and strength it would leave her again; and so, like every woman in England, there was nothing left for them to do now but to wait the issue of the war.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEWS FROM THE CRIMEA.

"Ah! one day—one day—it may be,
Strife and peril past,
By a way that now we know not,
Won by prayer and fast,
Passing hope beyond expectance,
Peace will come at last."

DAYS have passed into weeks, and weeks into months, and it is the spring of 1856; and once more, as in the first pages of this book, the twins are in the pleasant drawing-room of the Grange, reading with eager interest a letter that is lying on the table between them.

The years that have passed over their heads since that first January day we saw them have changed them both—changed them more, perhaps, than five years of ordinary life would have done.

Genie is the least outwardly altered of the two; but you unconsciously feel, as you look at her, that the love that changes the girl into the woman

has come to her, and left her not quite the same dreamy girl she was before; but, if the dreams are gone, we may be sure that to gentle, unselfish Genie, something far higher has been given in their place. And Miss Molly?—"Sweet Miss Molly," as Rex used to call her, my heroine—and surely despite her faults and foibles, she was well worthy of the name,—how had time dealt with her in all these long lonely months—months in which she had known the sorrows and cares of a life-time?

Looking at her, you saw the change that you only guessed at in her sister. In the smile that played round the sweet mouth, there had come a graver look than of yore; and in the soft, dark eyes, that were raised at every unusual sound with a question in them, you could read the story of waiting, that, despite her courage, was wearing her young life out. But it was only to those who looked very carefully that all this was apparent. To others—to the common outside world—Miss Molly was just the same as of old; even her father and mother, beyond thinking that Molly was not as noisy as she used to be, did not see any great difference in her. As her health and strength had returned, the fretfulness that had troubled her mother had passed away, and had left her the Miss Molly of olden times—the same laughter-lov-

ing, bright girl they remembered, only softer, and at times more affectionate, if that were possible.

And Molly, seeing the anxious look leaving her mother's face, did her very best that it should not return by any fault of hers; not that her gaiety was put on: youth has the one great mercy vouchsafed it of being able to throw off its burdens and take moments of rest; its sorrows are not ever present, as they become as we grow older: and so there were times when Miss Molly lived in the present, and forgot the past, or nearly so, and was as light-hearted and wilful and winning as ever; and her mother was deceived, and took comfort, and believed that the time was coming when Miss Molly would carve out for herself a new future, as Reginald Burnaby had commanded her to do. And her thoughts and hopes always, after these meditations, settled on the time when the war should be over and *they* should return from the Crimea. But then Lady Anstruther did not see the fits of despondency that, as was only natural, followed the fits of high spirits. No; these Molly hid from all—only Genie sometimes, entering the schoolroom, would find her sister, as on the moonlight night after the eventful visit to the Hall, looking out over the garden, with its clipped yews and holly hedge—the garden where Rex had told her of his love—sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Don't tell any one," she would whisper through her tears; "only, Genie, it is sometimes more than I can bear. Think of Cecil, Genie, and then fancy feeling it would be better if he were dead."

And Genie shivered, and then tried to comfort her sister, which was a difficult task, when there was so very little comfort to offer. But that was the dark side of the picture—a side which Molly rarely permitted any one to see; and no one, not even Genie, suspected the mad, wild longing that sometimes filled her sister just to hear the sound of his voice, or to feel the touch of his hand.

The letter the twins were reading that bright spring day was one from Colonel Kingscote, telling them that he hoped very soon now to be at home again—that the long winter which succeeded the taking of Sebastopol had passed away at length, and there was nothing now to prevent the troops returning to England. Genie had got as far as that in her reading aloud, when she stopped suddenly.

"What is it?" said Molly, seeing the pained look on her sister's face—"what is it?" After that moment's hesitation Genie went on—

"You knew Winwick, did you not, when he was staying down near us two years ago? Well, I have been seeing a good deal of him lately: he volunteered for this war, and his quarters were not

far off from mine; and a nicer fellow I never came across, and now I have just come back from following him to his grave. He was badly wounded at the taking of Sebastopol, and has been ill with fever ever since. I don't know any one that has been sacrificed in this war that I regret more. He left a message for Molly, which I will give her when I see her."

As Genie finished reading, Molly lifted her eyes to her face. "Oh, Genie, how dreadful! I feel so guilty about that man; for I know I did try to make him care for me—and I succeeded;" and then, to Genie's wonder and surprise, Molly told her all the rest of Mr Winwick's story, even to the Christmas eve when he had come to see her, and had taken her message to Rex. "I never seemed," said Molly, tearfully, "to recognise what a good man he was till now. Poor Mr Winwick!" and Genie, grasping from Molly's disconnected story the principal facts, was ready to acknowledge, with Cecil Kingscote, that many a better man could have been better spared than he who slept far away from home and friends in his Crimean grave.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE SLEEPS WELL.

"Ah! for one heart
To take a part
In all my pain and pleasure."
—WALLER.

WELL, the two years' war was over, the last Russian gun was silenced, the great Powers that had been foes so long were friends once more, the swords were sheathed, and Europe was at peace again. At peace again! with nothing left to do now but to tell the wives and mothers who were watching eagerly for the return of their heroes, that such a husband, such a son, had laid down his life as part of the price of victory.

But in the home-coming Genie was awaiting there was no grief, except in so far as the shadow of others' sorrows must always fall across our own joys; and when Cecil Kingscote entered the drawing-room of the Grange the day after his return home, Genie, in her intense and innocent rejoicing, for the first time almost in her life had never a

thought for Molly. And where was Molly, in those first moments when mother and son were reunited, when Genie was recounting all the griefs and anxieties of the last eighteen months with Cecil's arm around her, and Cecil's kisses on her lips? Down in the Brook garden, with her scarlet cloak wrapped around her, as on that other day, seated on the ground, with her head resting on the bed of violets, which they had sought over so diligently together, was Miss Molly, sobbing wildly and passionately, crying as she had never cried since that farewell to Rex in prison. Hitherto she had rather avoided the place; but to-day, somehow, she had felt that a glimpse of the places haunted by the past would be preferable to the dreary reality; and so at the first sound of Cecil Kingscote's voice she had fled there.

"Oh, Rex, Rex!" she moaned, laying her hand softly and caressingly over the violet plants as she spoke—"poor Rex!"

No word of blame did she ever even in thought attach to him—not even now, when she felt that her punishment was as hard as his. "Poor Rex! Oh, how dreadful it must be to him to hear that they have come home, and he not with them!" And then at the thought of how she might have been welcoming him back, her tears began to flow afresh. At last, on glancing up, she became aware

from the shadowy look of everything around, that it was getting late; and fearing lest any one, wondering what might have become of her, should have started to seek for her, she rose sadly and sorrowfully to her feet and returned home. But the sound of the low voices within, as she passed the drawing-room door, convinced her that even Genie had forgotten her. With a heavy heart she turned up the stairs to her own room, and threw herself down on her bed. The opening of the door did not rouse her; and it was only her little sister's saying, "Molly, is it you?" that made her open her eyes.

"Yes, it is I, Lily; what do you want?"

"Oh, Miss Molly," said the child, climbing up on to the bed as she spoke, and throwing her arms round Molly's neck, "I am so disappointed; I thought Rex was coming home to-day, and he is not, for I have been down to see."

Little Lily's sympathy seemed to show Molly more clearly than ever the greatness of her sorrow; she stretched out her arms, and drew the child into her embrace, and clasped her close to her aching heart, as though she were a shield between her and the grief that was around her, while the tears coursed down her cheeks. "What is it?" asked Lily, frightened at the storm she had roused—"what is it? Is he never coming back?"

"Never, Lily!" cried Molly—"never! and it is breaking my heart;" and then, grieved at the startled look in the child's eyes, she brushed away her tears and rose to her feet.

"Don't mind what I say, Lily; I am unhappy, and don't know what I am doing. There, give me a kiss, and don't look so miserable."

"Poor Molly!" said Lily, tenderly; "and Rex, is it really true he is never coming back?"

"Quite true."

"Poor Rex!" repeated the child, and Molly gave her another kiss for Reginald Burnaby's sake.

After Lily had gone, Molly still stayed on in the room alone, but she wept no more; Lily's ready sympathy seemed to have touched the sore spot in her heart and healed it. She stood by the window looking out into the night, and thinking of the hundreds of hearts which that evening were rejoicing, like Genie's, over those who had returned to their love and care; and of the hundreds of hearts that were aching, like hers, at the thought that their loved ones never would return—and yet not quite like hers either; for would she not most willingly have exchanged her present, aye, and her future too, for that of any woman, who with tearful eyes could think of her loved one as dead on the field of honour? And in the midst of these thoughts Genie crept quietly into the room, and putting her

arm around Molly's waist, and her head on her shoulder, asked her to wish her joy of her happy future; and Molly having wept all her bitter feelings away, could do it with a whole heart, and listen to Genie's soft whispers as to how they were going to be married immediately. "There is really only one thing that I grieve about, Molly, and that is, what you will do when I am gone—not that I shall be so very far off; for Mrs Kingscote will not hear of our living anywhere else but at the Hall, so I suppose we shall settle down there; and I don't think," said Genie, with an amused smile, "I am likely to quarrel with my mother-in-law—do you?"

"No, indeed," said Molly, kissing her; "I can't imagine you ever quarrelling with any one, or any one with you. But now, dear, you must go back to Colonel Kingscote, who, I suppose, is going to spend the evening here; and you must make some excuse for me, for really I have such a tremendous headache, I could never sit through dinner; but you may send me up something into the schoolroom."

"You poor thing!" cried Genie, penitently; "and here have I been making you listen to all my story when you are looking unfit for anything. Joy is making me blind or selfish, or something. Well, let me make up for the past by taking you into the schoolroom and putting you on the sofa, and getting you some sal-volatile."

Genie felt more remorseful than ever when, on entering the room dressed for dinner half an hour later, she saw how pale and ill Molly looked. "Would it make your head worse if I were to send Hubert up to you after dinner?"

"No, indeed; I should like it. Dear fellow! I only just seem to have had time to say 'How do you do?' to him. Mamma had so much to say to him that she did not give me a chance of getting in a word edgeways. And Genie——"

"Yes, dear."

"Could you spare Colonel Kingscote for ten minutes in the evening as well? I should like to see him."

"Of course he shall come. Good-bye;" but still Genie waited, with the handle in her hand, looking at her sister. "I am so sorry to leave you, Molly; are you sure there is nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing," replied Molly, sadly; and glancing as she spoke at the figure in the doorway; "how pretty you look, Genie! I declare love and happiness are making you quite lovely! Ask Cecil if he does not think so too." And with a happy laugh and heightened colour Genie went.

Hubert and Molly had in the old days always been fast friends; friends in childhood—friends in the days when the one had been a schoolboy and the other a wild, wilful girl, beyond the control of

any governess; and when the schoolboy had become a man, and had gone out into the world, leaving the home-life behind him, the friendship had not fallen through, as is so often the case between a brother and a sister; on the contrary, it had grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength: but on this evening, as they sat talking together over the schoolroom fire, Hubert felt that something lay between them—that, man as he was now, he could never hope to reach the heights the woman had, by reason of the great sorrow she had known. Long he stayed with her, talking to her, and telling her anecdotes of things which had befallen him in the Crimea; things, little enough in the telling perhaps, but of wonderful interest when it is our own loved one to whom it happened. But at last his reminiscences were interrupted by Colonel Kingscote's voice asking if he could come in. Hubert rose up and opened the door for him, "Come in," he said, "I will give you up my place; and, in the meantime, I will go and see what Genie has to say for herself."

"How are you, dear Molly?" said Colonel Kingscote, going up to her side and taking her hand in his; "I cannot tell you what pleasure it gives me to see you again."

"Well may Genie be proud of him," thought the girl, as she glanced up at the Colonel's tall, com-

manding figure, as he bent over her; and then she repeated, "How am I? Quite well, now *you* have come home; for you will go and see him, will you not? and let me hear if he is well."

For a minute Cecil half smiled, as she so frankly and honestly stated her reasons why she was so glad he had returned; but at the sight of those dark eyes saddened by reason of the faithful love they had known, the smile turned into a sigh.

"Have you, then," he said, sitting down beside her, "heard nothing of him since I left?"

"Yes," she replied, softly; "poor Mr Winwick went to see him before he sailed for the Crimea; but that was a year ago last Christmas. Oh, Colonel Kingscote!" she broke off with a sudden sharp pain in her voice, "do you think all the years will be as long as this one has been?"

"No," returned Colonel Kingscote, soothingly, "indeed I do not. The first years are always the longest. Did you see Winwick after he had been?"

"No; he wrote to me and told me that *he* was well."

As she spoke, Colonel Kingscote remembered Mr Winwick's description of that meeting—which he had so briefly related to Molly—to himself in the Crimea. He had been much surprised at the time when Mr Winwick had told him that before leav-

ing England he had seen Rex Burnaby, knowing, as he did, that the men were so very slightly acquainted, for Miss Molly's part of the story Mr Winwick had left out. And he remembered how Mr Winwick had told him that he was really afraid, in the few minutes he spent with Mr Burnaby, that he would have gone mad when he heard from him that his regiment was in the Crimea, and that the fighting had begun; even the miserable life he was leading seemed to be forgotten in hearing what he had lost. And remembering all this, Colonel Kingscote honoured Mr Winwick all the more for having spared poor broken-hearted Molly any particulars of that visit.

"Yes, certainly, Molly, I will go," he said; "I will try and see him; but at any rate I am sure I can find out for you whether he is well." And Molly rested satisfied with his promise.

"Did you not say in one of your letters," she began presently, "that Mr Winwick asked you to give me some message?"

"It was nothing very much; only, one day before he died, he asked me to tell you, after I came home, that he hoped you would consider what he had done for you as a peace-offering for the trouble he had caused you. I understand it now," concluded Colonel Kingscote, "since I have heard why he went to see Rex;" and then seeing

Molly's disturbed countenance, he went on hastily, "Don't think from that, that poor Winwick made any confidences to me, for indeed he did not; only I can guess enough," he added kindly, turning his eyes away from Molly's burning cheeks, "to comprehend the rest." And as they sat there thus silent in that comfortable English room, for a minute their thoughts wandered away to the man who had loved so nobly and so well, and who was now lying in his lonely grave so far away.

"Has he any one belonging to him?" asked Molly, at length.

"Not that I have heard," replied Colonel Kingscote;" he was an orphan, I know. Except the old aunt with whom he used to stay near here, and a cousin who died last year, I have never heard him mention any relations. He left all his money to a hospital in London."

"Was any stone put over his grave, Colonel Kingscote? Because, if not, I should like to have it done."

"I spoke about it, before I left. I shall be writing on the subject in a few days. I wanted a plain stone cross, with just his name and where he died, with the date, and underneath a text—the choice of which text I should like to leave to you."

For a few minutes Molly bent her head in

thought, and then she spoke—"I think I should like you to put upon the cross, 'Make no weeping for the dead, for he is at rest.'"

So Miss Molly chose out of the depths of her own bitter sorrow, having realised the truth of the words that death is not the greatest evil that can come to our beloved. And Cecil Kingscote, guessing the thoughts that made her so choose, without a word acquiesced in her decision.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOR EVER TRUE.

"My pride fell with my fortunes."
—*As You Like It.*

GENIE'S approaching marriage was the all-absorbing topic of conversation now; the 14th June was to be the day, as Genie had a fancy it should be in the first days of summer. It was to be a very quiet wedding; no one beyond the family were to be asked to it. This was for Molly's sake; for her sake both Cecil and Genie wished to avoid any unnecessary merry-making. But Molly did not seem at all inclined to be unhappy: she entered into all the preparations with almost her old excitability; but whether this was to prevent herself thinking, or to hide her thoughts from those around, Genie could not quite make out.

"Mother," said Molly, going one day into the drawing-room, where Lady Anstruther was busy

writing, "may I write to Winifred, and tell her why we have not asked her to this wedding?"

"Yes, do, dear."

"And may I," went on Molly in a hesitating way—"may I ask her to come here after all this excitement is over?"

"Do you very much wish it, Molly?" questioned her mother slowly, without looking up from her letter. Molly sighed.

"Yes, very much."

"Then do it, child, if it will please you."

"Thank you, darling mother," said Molly, kissing her.

Then she went up-stairs and wrote her note—an affectionate little note—saying that now all these months of anxiety were over, and they had time to think of others besides those who had been so long away, and who were now safe at home again, she begged that Winifred would come and see her.

By return of post Winifred answered: She was very sorry that she could not go down to the Grange; but that her aunt, Mrs Burnett, had become so dependent on her that she did not like to leave her. She hoped, however, that Lady Anstruther would let Molly go and stay with her in London after Genie was married. If she would agree to this, she would take great care of her, and make her as happy as she could. Then, with many

loving messages to Genie, and wishes for her future happiness, she remained, as ever, her affectionate Winifred.

Molly read it over two or three times, and then took it to Lady Anstruther. "Please, let me go, dear mother," she exclaimed, putting it in her hand; "I should so very much like it;" and Lady Anstruther could not refuse her, though she herself thought it foolish, and a mere useless reviving of the past.

The sun rose on the morning of the 14th of June as bright and glorious as any one could desire.

"What a perfect wedding-day!" said Molly, wakening her sister with a kiss. "Don't you wish, now that you see the sort of weather it is, that you had asked every one you had ever heard of, and heaps of bridesmaids, instead of only me?"

"I could have none worthy to walk with you, Molly dear," said her sister, as she returned the kiss.

One of Colonel Kingscote's brother officers was to officiate as best man. To both the sisters—though they never mentioned it to one another—when Cecil told them that, came back a remembrance of the day when they had first heard of the other brother officer, over whose advent they had laughed so merrily that other day only two years ago.

But beyond his being of the same regiment, there was certainly no resemblance between Mr Hastings and Reginald Burnaby. He was little and fair-haired—rather amusing, too, in his way; and he certainly managed to get through a tolerable amount of flirtation in the course of the day with the bride's pretty sister.

Miss Molly laughed and talked, quite like the Miss Molly of olden days, all through the wedding-breakfast, so that it did her sister's heart good to see her.

There was not a shadow on her face till Mr Hastings came up to wish her good-bye, which he had to do early, as he was obliged to leave by an afternoon train; then, with a glance at her watch-chain, he suddenly said, "Why,—do you wear a broken sixpence too?" and he held up a corresponding one. "Shall we exchange in memory of this pleasant day?"

He was quite startled by the look that came into Miss Molly's eyes.

"What! give you my charm?" she exclaimed, as though she had not quite understood him, and clasping it tight as she spoke. "What do you mean?" and then, changing her voice, "I beg your pardon," she went on more quietly, "but this sixpence is not mine; it was lent to me by a friend."

And Mr Hastings concluded in his own heart,

as he begged her pardon for having annoyed her, and wished her good-bye, that the friend was dead, and that that was the reason of Miss Molly's distressed looks.

Genie made a perfect bride; she just cried a little as she said good-bye to the home where she had been so happy, and yet not enough to sadden any one; and when she got into the carriage to drive away, she looked most radiantly happy.

"Molly," said Colonel Kingscote, leaning over her as she stood on the hall door-step, before he followed Genie—"Molly dear, I have had the answer to my question: he would not see me; but he is well."

Molly had not time to reply; she had time for nothing but one swift grateful look, and he was gone—gone to his new life, taking Genie with him, and leaving her all alone in the old home they had both loved so well.

Directly the wedding was well over, and things had fallen once more into their usual state, Molly went to London to pay her visit to Miss Burnaby.

Her first glance at Winifred convinced her that her character had not softened in the trial through which she had come. There were harder lines than there used to be round the mouth, and the eyes were less soft in expression—at least so Molly imagined on first seeing her.

But she was very gentle and affectionate, and it was not till they were in Molly's room, whither they had both retired on leaving the drawing-room, that the subject that was nearest the hearts of both was broached.

Molly opened the conversation by saying, "Why don't you ever go and stay with Arthur and his wife?"

Before her stern young judge, Winifred felt quite confused as she answered, with some hesitation, "Because I cannot, Molly. I cannot bear to see him—that is the fact. And besides," she went on, "how can I leave my aunt? Don't you see how much she requires me?"

The determination which had characterised the last part of the speech died away, and, with a doubting voice, she asked, as Molly remained quite silent, "Do you think I am to blame, then?"

"Yes, I do," answered Molly, steadily; "I think you are very much to blame. Putting it on no higher grounds, I think it is wrong to let all the world see that you will not go to your brother's house. It is not," she went on, "as if Janet were anything else but what she is, perfectly nice and ladylike. People *will* talk, Winifred; and they will not hesitate to say that Winifred Burnaby's pride was too great for her to forgive her own brother—even allowing that there is anything to forgive."

Winifred was silent. Was not Molly, after all, merely giving utterance to thoughts which had been trying to make themselves heard for many months?

"Winifred," went on Molly—and her voice trembled now—"when *he* comes home, what will he say? Do you not think it will make it all the worse for him to find that this is added to his other troubles?"

"Don't, Molly," cried Winifred; "I know I am wrong. I have known it all along, only I did not wish to think it; but to-morrow I will do my best to set it right. I will write to Janet." It was always such a pity that Winifred had been left so much to her own guidance, for surely there was no one who listened to advice more patiently, or more often took it.

"That is right, Winifred; I am sure you will be glad when you have written—there is always a satisfaction in doing right." Molly's visit was a pleasant one on the whole Under her gentle influence Winifred gradually thawed out of her barrier of pride. She had lived so long looking upon Rex's name as one to be banished for ever from her lips—and, if it were possible, from her heart, that it was a pleasure, though an unacknowledged one, to hear Molly speaking in her trustful loving tones of the time when Rex should "come home."

"Can you think of it as a pleasure, Molly?" she

said, one day; "I, I am ashamed to say, sometimes look forward to that time with dread."

"With dread!" repeated Molly, as if unable to grasp the meaning of her words—"with dread! Why, that is what I am living for."

"I am ashamed to have said it, Molly, when I look at you—I suppose it is my hateful pride; but just think of it"—and she buried her face in her hands—"think of the disgrace."

Molly knelt down beside her, and threw her arms around her. "Dear Winifred," she said, in a low voice, "I *cannot* think of it—I suppose my love must have conquered my pride; but anyhow, I can think of nothing but the terrible time it is since I have seen him—and till I shall see him, nearly three years more;" and Molly sobbed from utter weariness of heart at the prospect.

Winifred, sorry for her apparent want of sympathy, soothed and comforted her. "Don't you care for him?" Molly asked at length. "You used to be so fond of him; how can you talk of him as you do, if you are?"

"Yes, indeed I am, said Winifred; "I have been thinking all these past months that I had forgotten my love for him. I have been hoping that I had; but now you have brought him back to me as he was in those days when you first knew him, when he was the very light of my eyes; you

have awoke in me the knowledge that sinning cannot take away our affection for those we really love; and oh, Miss Molly, it is more than I can bear! I cannot think now," she went on, "how I have borne it so long, except by the fact that I have always so steadily thought of him hitherto as Lawrence White's murderer"—she felt Molly tremble all over as she said the words; "and to-night I can only think of him as my brother—and my brother so fondly loved, too."

"Poor Winifred!" said Molly, caressingly; "it is equally dreadful for us all."

"No, it is not so bad for you, Molly, for you have been so true to your love for him through it all; and I, as you say, have considered my pride before my love."

Winifred wrote to Janet, as she had promised, a penitent, sorrowful letter, confessing how she had let her foolish, sinful pride stand between them so long, and begging for forgiveness. Shortly afterwards came Janet's answer, thanking her for her note, and saying how pleased and happy she was to have received it; and, with Arthur's and her own best love, she hoped that Winifred would once more consider their request, and go and stay with them—which invitation Winifred wrote back and accepted, much to Molly's delight.

And so it gradually came round to the last

evening of Molly's stay; and once more she and Winifred stood talking together in her room before going to bed. She had enjoyed her visit, and was sorry to be going;—for the girls had amused themselves as they pleased, Winifred being, to all intents and purposes, the mistress of the house, as old Mrs Burnett was an invalid, who rarely left her own room;—and Molly was telling Winifred this fact, of how happy she had been, as they two stood in the summer twilight together.

"Then you will go down to Arthur's soon, Winifred?"—and Winifred assented.

"Directly Aunt Bertha can spare me, I will go."

"Thank you, Winifred, for myself; and thank you for Rex, for I am sure he would be so pleased. Winifred," she added presently, without turning her eyes from the blue, starry sky above her—"Winifred, did you ever hear what became of Mrs White.

"She is dead," replied Winifred, gently; "did you not know?"

"No, I never heard. But I am glad, Winifred, for I like to be able to think of *them* as together; and in heaven I am sure she will forgive *him!*"

"Good night," said Winifred, hurriedly, choking back her tears, as she kissed the sweet face—"good night, dear Miss Molly."

For a minute after she was left alone, Molly

remained standing in the window; and then she knelt down in the light of the rising moon and prayed for forgiveness for herself and all those dear to her, and lastly for mercy on all prisoners and captives; and then she slept, and dreamt happy dreams of herself and Rex, as they had been in those bright days at Aston. Molly returned to Eversleigh with a lighter heart, satisfied that she had done the work that had been required of her; more than satisfied when Janet Burnaby wrote and thanked her for the great kindness she had done them—the great happiness she had given both Arthur and herself—and asking her if she would go and see them now that they had returned from Italy, and were comfortably settled at home. But Molly refused. Not yet could she bear to go to the place where she had known such happy days with *him;* perhaps at some future time it would be a pleasure, but at present it would be only pain.

She told Janet all this, and *she* fully understood how it was.

And so the time passed on, and Molly remained always with her father and mother in her well-loved home. She went to balls and parties as of old; and was, as of old, the life of every entertainment. Everywhere she went she was chaperoned by Genie, which used to amuse the twins very

much. But Genie, as Cecil Kingscote's wife and the mother of the heir of Eversleigh Hall, was, as she had always been, many, many years older in everything than Miss Molly; and she was, as Molly averred, a very pleasant person to go out with, as she never asked any questions as to how many times she danced with any one, and was never anxious to return home before Molly was quite ready.

CHAPTER XXV.

MY HEART IS SAIR FOR SOMEBODY.

"Oh, love, love, love,
Soon makes the hair turn grey,
When only one fills all the heart,
And that one's far away!"
—E. Cook.

Interminable as five years seem when first contemplated—impossible as it may appear that such a length of separation will ever pass away—yet the day must eventually arrive when we can joyfully exclaim that it is over; and then nothing is left to do but to look at ourselves, and the one that is dearer to us than ourself, and wonder what the years that have dragged themselves so wearily away have robbed us of.

All this Miss Molly was thinking as, in the late autumn of 1859, she was riding slowly through the lanes where, in the happy days of the early spring, now so long gone by, she had driven with Rex Burnaby, and listened to the story of his love.

The time of year was different now to what it had been then; the trees were almost bare, and the leaves that had been in their glory all summer lay in heaps of red and yellow by the roadside, blown here and there at the mercy of the October blasts, that had been sweeping over the country for the last week. But a lull in the storm had come now—a lull that would not perhaps last for long; but in the meantime there was a hush on all around—a pause between the warm pleasures of the summer that was over and the fierce storms of the dreary winter that was coming.

As she rode along, Miss Molly was thinking of that time when she and Rex had been there last together,—thinking sadly, too; for, if possible, these last three months had been more anxious than the years that had preceded them; for Reginald was out of prison, she knew; but from the day he had left till now, she had heard nothing of him—nothing to give her the slightest clue to his whereabouts.

She was wondering, in a sad sort of way, whether his love had waxed dim in all these years, or whether he doubted hers.

Seeing her grief and harassed looks, and guessing their cause, Colonel Kingscote had started off on an expedition to London to try and hear something about him; and to hear the result of this expedition was the real object of Molly's ride—

the real object; but the ostensible one was, that this evening there was to be a dance at the Hall, in honour of Cecil Kingscote's birthday; and Genie had begged her mother to let Molly go over early to help in the preparations: and Lady Anstruther, little guessing at the real reason of her daughter's anxiety, had willingly let her go. She, equally with her husband, had trembled on the fifth anniversary of that sad day that had darkened Molly's life; but when it came and went, and the days after it, and no sign of the man they had so much dreaded, then they rejoiced indeed, and Lady Anstruther was deeply thankful that poor Rex had had courage to keep his promise. And for Molly's sake even she did not grieve much. Molly had got over it, she decided; and though, of course, she was a little nervous and excitable for those few days, still that was only natural, knowing, as she did, that he who had once been everything to her was once more free. Still she had lived down the sorrow of it, her mother believed, as she had always thought she would; and now in time—Rex having remembered his promise, and having kept away from her and all those she knew—she would marry, and settle down into a loving wife and mother, as Genie had done. That was what her mother believed, and in the meantime——

In the meantime Molly, with flushed cheeks

and eager, questioning eyes, was standing in Genie's drawing-room, and asking her anxiously what was Colonel Kingscote's news.

"Cecil has not come back, dear Molly," replied Genie; "he must have been unable to get away by the night train; but he will be sure to be here this evening, and I do hope he will come early; but I cannot make out he can possibly be here before seven. We must begin dinner without him." Genie looked somewhat perturbed, for her—for she was not one given to making herself unnecessarily anxious; and Molly, seeing that, put her own troubles on one side, and tried to cheer up her sister.

"Oh, don't make yourself uneasy, Genie; Cecil is the last man not to be at home in time for such an important event as his own birthday dance: and as to there being so much to do, you must make use of me — that is what I have come so early for. I will begin by arranging the flowers if you like; you know I always had a talent that way."

The cloud vanished from Genie's brow, and soon she and her sister were laughing and talking as merrily over the arrangement of the red autumn leaves and delicate hothouse blossoms, as though they were the two happy girls we first knew.

"What have you settled about your dress for

this evening, Molly? How are you going to have it conveyed here?"

"Hubert and Mr Graves are going to drive over here, having invited themselves to dinner, and they will bring it with them."

"Oh, Molly!" exclaimed Genie, laughingly, "how is that man going on? As desperately in love as ever?"

"Just the same," replied Molly, laughing too; "but he conceals his affection so admirably, that no one could be made nervous by it."

"Has he spoken at all yet?" asked Genie. "You remember the evening we dined with you, it was universally declared that he had never uttered a sound since he entered the house. He is the strangest man for Hubert to have chosen for a friend I ever knew."

"Yes," replied Molly, "it is really worthy of note; he has spoken once. Up till late last night his affection, which consists in never letting me out of his sight for five minutes, was all carried on by dumb-show. But last night in the smoking-room he spoke, thus losing his right to the name Hubert and I had given him of 'the Silent Grave.'"

"What did he say?" asked Genie; "I really feel quite interested to know."

"I will tell you. He was seated, as I need scarcely remark, by me; my mother and I having

taken our work down to the smoking-room to keep them company. Taking his cigar out of his mouth he described some circles in the air with the smoke. 'Wedding-rings,' he remarked, without a smile on his face. I nodded. 'All smoke, you see,' he replied, sadly; and with that, relapsed into silence."

Genie laughed long and heartily at Mr Graves' gloomy views of life; and at last Molly interrupted her by saying, "I am doing him an injustice now, for he spoke on one other occasion. It was at dinner the day before yesterday, and I have not quite forgiven Hubert yet the share *he* took in the conversation. Suddenly, in the midst of a dead silence, this dreadful man turns to me, and in reply to my question as to whether they had had a good day's sport, says, in his slow voice, 'Oh, dear, no; or do you see any difference if I say, Oh no, dear?'

"I never heard papa laugh so heartily over anything; and as to Hubert, he positively shouted, and then wound up by crying, 'Well done, Silent Grave!' which made Mr Graves look questioningly from him to me; but though I, by many frowns, prevented Hubert saying anything more, I know he guesses who gave him his title."

"I shall quite look forward to having him over to dinner here, Molly. I should think he must be rather amusing when roused."

"Yes," Molly acknowledged he was; from which Genie suspected that Molly, when alone with the "Silent Grave," had not been as unsuccessful in making him talk as she appeared to be in public.

Colonel Kingscote did not arrive till very late—not till Genie had decided it was hopeless waiting any longer for him, and had begun dinner; but after they were all seated, the door opened and he walked into the room.

He looked somewhat anxious—so both Molly and his wife thought; but he put aside his anxieties, whatever they might have been, and apologising for his late appearance, and begging they would excuse a hasty toilet for the present, he laughed and talked with his guests as if there were not much wrong.

"Where is my mother?" he asked, looking round the table.

"She was tired," Genie replied, "or rather thought she would be, if, with the dance in prospect, she tried to come down. Molly has been sitting with her, and amusing her all the afternoon."

Directly dinner was over, Cecil went up-stairs to prepare himself for the evening, and Genie followed him, leaving her two guests to Molly's care in the drawing-room. Hubert soon betook himself to the smoking-room for one cigar before the toils of the evening, and Molly and Mr Graves were left alone together; and it did not appear such a

very difficult task entertaining him as from Molly's account it usually was. Certainly no one could accuse the Silent Grave that night of taciturnity. It was to be an early dance; and consequently, by nine o'clock the people had begun to arrive, and by half-past the dancing was well started.

"Genie," said Molly, touching her sister on the arm, as Mrs Kingscote, radiant in black velvet and diamonds, passed her, "did Cecil tell you anything?"

"No, he has heard nothing certain; but directly all this excitement is over, he will go down into Berkshire and see Arthur. So enjoy yourself, dear, and don't fret."

Molly turned away with a sigh—a sigh, however, that was soon exchanged for a smile, as a partner came up to claim her for a waltz.

Directly it was over, she turned round and escaped up the great staircase, to think for a minute over what she had just heard. The first room that she came across was the little Cecil's nursery, and she softly entered. It was quite deserted, for the nurse had gone down to try and get a glimpse of the dancing; and quite dark, save for the bright moonlight that lay in lines of light across the floor. For a minute or two Molly stood by the window, the moonbeams enveloping her in a flood of light, thinking of this that Genie had just told her, trying to realise what

the future would be if this were the end of all the waiting—if, after all these years, he fulfilled the threat he had made on the terrible day of their separation, and never came back—if, through all the rest of her life, she never saw him again. With a cry of pain she turned round to the baby's bed, and threw herself down on her knees beside it, and prayed with all her strength that God would send him to her. Then fearing that she might be missed, she rose to her feet, and pressing a kiss on the rosy cheeks of the sleeping child, she crept to the doorway. But as she left the room, she saw old Mrs Kingscote coming towards her: "Molly, child!" she exclaimed, "is that you? Why, what are you doing up here?"

"I have been in Cecil's nursery, dear Mrs Kingscote, looking at the moonlight; what a lovely night it is!"

"Now, Molly, you cannot deceive me; you have been crying—you know you have. What is the matter?"

"The matter!" echoed Molly, passionately; "everything is the matter. They are all so happy, Mrs Kingscote; and I——" and here she stopped to brush the tears out of her eyes.

"Poor child!—poor Molly!" said Mrs Kingscote, softly, "I always feel so guilty about you; somehow I seem, though most innocently, to have

had so much to do with destroying your life's happiness."

"Don't say that—please don't. They were very happy hours at the time, if I *have* paid dearly for them; and surely for happiness one may give the price one chooses. There now," she went on, "I must go down, or we shall have 'the Silent Grave' opening its mouth in vain;" and with a kiss she turned away, and ran lightly down-stairs.

Perhaps Mrs Kingscote, with her own troubles to look back upon, understood Molly better than any one. Never had she herself felt an instant's doubt of her constancy; she knew so well that the love Molly had given to Rex Burnaby is not ours to give twice in a lifetime.

"Poor Miss Molly!" she repeated to herself, "and poor Rex! Where on earth can he be, that even Cecil cannot find him?"

Very quietly did Molly re-enter the ball-room: she hoped that her absence would not have been noticed by any one, but she was mistaken; for directly she appeared, Mr Graves came up to her and said, "I began to fear that you were for ever lost to sight, though to memory dear. Is your card quite full? Because I have discovered a friend of mine here who is partnerless, and particularly anxious to be introduced to you."

"Oh no, I am not engaged for the whole

evening yet; please introduce him. What is his name?"

"His name is Pritchard—Sir Henry Pritchard; there he is,"—and Mr Graves dived after a retreating man and brought him up to Molly.

"Sir Henry Pritchard, Miss Anstruther," he murmured; and then he gracefully retired, leaving Molly to take care, or be taken care of by the new-comer.

"Are you engaged for this *valse?*" he asked; "if not, will you dance it with me?"

Molly agreed, and Sir Henry sat down by her side till such time as the music should recommence.

"They have changed our *valse* to a quadrille," he remarked in a few minutes, "so of course it does not count; but will you, if you are not engaged for this, come and sit it out with me in the passage—it will be cooler than in this hot room?"

Molly acquiesced, and they went outside and sat down in the hall.

Sir Henry Pritchard was a very agreeable man, not particularly young; and the time passed away pleasantly enough till, in some anecdote he was amusing Molly with, in speaking of some one he remarked, "he was a brother officer of mine."

"Are you in the army then?" asked Molly; "I had no idea of that."

"I *was* in the army," corrected Sir Henry, "but I left it years and years ago. My regiment was the —th Hussars."

"Why, that is, or rather was, Cecil's regiment too; for he, you know, sold out after the Crimean war."

"Yes, but I only heard both those pieces of information after I came here to-night; I had not the least idea, when the Macdonalds asked me to join their party, I should find that our host had been one of 'Ours.'"

Having got on a topic that had so much common interest for them, Sir Henry soon found out that Molly had met many of the officers of the —th Hussars that he had known. They found so much to say to one another, that the quadrilles and their dance were alike terminated, and another *valse* had begun, before Molly had the least idea of it.

"Look, Miss Anstruther," said Sir Henry, just as they were thinking of rising and returning to the ball-room for their neglected dance—"look, you have dropped something off your chain," and he stooped and gave her back her broken sixpence. "That charm reminds me," he went on, "of another fellow who used to be in our regiment, a certain Captain Burnaby, I suppose because he always used to wear its fac-simile; did you ever meet him?"

Molly made some unintelligible answer, upon

hearing which he went on—"Perhaps you may have heard of him; he was the man who murdered Lawrence White, and got five years for it."

Despite the shiver Molly gave at his words, she managed to steady her trembling lips sufficiently to say, "I have heard of him. But his five years are up now; what is he doing?"

She asked that question, for a wild hope had sprung up in her heart that perhaps this man might have heard something of him. Sir Henry, glancing into her eager face, and thinking she was interested merely with a girl's curiosity as to what had become of a man who had committed such a grievous crime, was about to speak when Molly, seeing that look, added, in trembling tones, "I knew him, and so I should like to hear what has become of him."

"I will tell you, then," said Sir Henry; "only be sure you do not repeat it, because I think he does not want it known. In a short while there will be no need of secrecy, because I believe he is going to leave the country immediately."

At those words Molly felt herself grow a shade whiter, but she answered him bravely enough—

"You may trust me."

"You were his friend?"

"I *am* his friend," replied Molly, steadily; "so let me hear what he is doing."

"He is at his own home," said Sir Henry, "where he has been ever since he got out of prison, living with his brother Sir Arthur at Aston Manor. Do you know that part of the country at all? I was staying near there last week, and that is how I heard all this. Poor Burnaby! I knew him years ago, when he was as nice a fellow as ever I met. Poor Burnaby!" and he sighed.

Molly gave a little sigh too.

"It is a sad story, is it not, Miss Anstruther? Such a wasted life! He has been at home now for three months, and not a living soul has seen him since he returned. He stays shut up the whole day—at least so they say about there; but they told me he was going abroad directly. I daresay it will be better and happier for him. He was to have been married too, poor fellow!"

Sir Henry, who was a kind-hearted man, looked down, seeking sympathy for the sad, wrecked life he had been describing, into Miss Molly's sweet face, and to his surprise saw that her eyes were full of tears. An exclamation of sorrow for having so grieved her rose to his lips; but before he could speak she got up from her seat, and saying, in a low voice, "Never mind, you did not mean to vex me," fled past him up the broad staircase to her own room. Left thus abruptly alone, Sir Henry rose to his feet, and gave a long low whistle, ex-

pressive of the utmost surprise: then a look, almost of horror, came into his eyes, and a dim recollection of something he had once heard, into his mind; and quickly he entered the ball-room, and looked round for Colonel Kingscote, whom he soon discovered. Going up to his side, he said, in a low voice, "I say, Kingscote, who was the girl I was sitting out in the passage talking to just now?"

"Miss Anstruther, my wife's sister."

"Wait a minute, Kingscote," for Cecil was moving away; "what was the name of the girl who was to have married Reginald Burnaby—the man whom there was that trial for murder about, just before the Crimean war?"

"Miss Anstruther," said Cecil, gravely.

"The same girl?" questioned Sir Henry, anxiously.

"The same girl," Cecil answered, looking, as he spoke, straight into his companion's eyes; "so the less *that* name gets into your conversation the better."

"You should have warned me before," replied the other, as he turned away—"you should have warned me before; the mischief is done now."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DINNA FORGET, LOVE! DINNA FORGET!

"But he who never sins can little boast,
Compared to him who goes and sins no more."
—C. P. WILLIS.

LONG before lunch the next day, Lady Anstruther was surprised by Molly's returning home; for it was not often that Genie, having once got her sister, let her go again so soon. "Why, Molly," exclaimed her father, meeting her in the passage, "I thought we had got rid of you for *twenty-four hours* at least. What is the matter?"

"Now, you know, dear father, you have been wishing this whole morning that you could find any reasonable excuse to send for me to come home again; now, have you not?"

Which being pretty nearly the truth, Sir Geoffrey said nothing, but, with a kiss, let her run up to her mother's room.

But once in that room, with the door shut, the smiles forsook her face. Throwing herself down at

her mother's feet, and taking her hand in hers, she looked up in Lady Anstruther's face, and said, in a low voice—

"He has gone home."

No need for any explanation—no need for any name even; well enough Lady Anstruther knew to whom Molly was alluding. "To Aston, Molly?"

"Yes."

"Why do you tell me this, Molly? What do you wish me to do? What *can* I do?"

"Oh, mother—darling mother," cried Molly, "do what I am going to ask you: take me to him. Think of him, darling," she went on, pleadingly, looking up into Lady Anstruther's face with her dark tearful eyes—"think of him: he has been there for months now, all alone, and no one has ever seen him yet outside the house; and now he is going abroad, and I shall never see him again. Think of what he must be suffering, mother mine, and no one to comfort him. Do not say No—let me go to him."

"But, Molly," said her mother, rising and pacing up and down the room, "think of the other side of the question now—think what your going to him means. The old love has come back now because you have heard this; but, Molly, would you ever be able to bear, in the years to come, that he should be pointed out and known for what he is? Do you remember all this?"

"Yes, I remember everything, mother; but, all the same, I can think of nothing save that he is lonely and in misery, and that I could comfort him. And besides," she added, in more passionate tones, "is not this what I have waited all these five years for?"

Lady Anstruther sighed as she remembered how she had hoped of late that the old dream was fading away in the mists of memory; but, after that sigh, she went on—"Think also, Molly, what you may find him. Five years is a long time, and a man's love is not a thing to last for ever; *he* may have changed. You must not think me hard, dear Molly; but I am older than you, and have seen more of the world—and I do so wish my child to be happy."

"Then, if you do indeed wish that," exclaimed Molly, starting up, "let me go; I will risk everything, even that his love should have grown cold. If that be indeed the case, mother—well, then, he will not need me; and you and I can return here, and settle down together into a comfortable old age, and take care of the children between us."

And gradually Molly's pleading prevailed—gradually, for the sake of the dear love she bore Miss Molly, Lady Anstruther gave way; but first she asked, "You are still quite certain that, despite all I have said, you wish to go? Oh, Molly, for the last time, think of your future!" And Miss

Molly answered steadily, looking into her mother's eyes as she spoke, "I have thought of it, mother, and the only thing I cannot bear to contemplate is a future without Rex." And then Lady Anstruther, feeling it would be useless to resist further, gave Molly the required promise.

Somehow, too, she and Molly, between them, gained Sir Geoffrey's consent; perhaps because he had fallen into such a habit of late of never refusing Molly anything—a bad habit, he acknowledged now, but one which he could not overcome all at once; and so he said Yes, and was rewarded by Molly's bright, happy looks, and deep, heartfelt gratitude.

Lady Anstruther tried to put off the day of the departure; but Molly's feverish impatience was not to be restrained; and, on the day after she had returned home, she and her mother started on their journey to Berkshire.

How often, as they flew past busy towns or quiet country villages, Molly recalled those two other days when she had followed the same route! That first time, when she and Genie had gone, without a sorrow in their young, untried girlhood; and that other time, when, almost insensible with grief, Colonel Kingscote had brought her to hear the history of the tragedy which had saddened so many lives, five years ago.

Well, it was all over now—at least as much of it as would ever be over in this world. There were some parts of that five years, Molly thought, as she sat there silently gazing out at the flying landscape, that, though she were to live a thousand years, would never cease to be part of her everyday life—and it is as well it should be so; for if the *memory* of suffering passed away as the suffering itself does, surely we should forget the lessons taught by it. All through the journey and the long cold drive to Aston, Miss Molly spoke no more than she had done on that last dreadful occasion—never spoke till the fly that had brought them stopped at the door, when she turned and kissed Lady Anstruther, and whispered, "Whatever comes of this, I shall never feel anything but most grateful to you, my darling mother, for having brought me." And then the door was opened. How well Molly remembered it all, as she stood in the lighted hall! She seemed to see herself standing in the doorway, watching, with love and pride, Rex's tall, handsome figure vanishing in the darkness—the last time she had seen him with no murder-stain on his soul; and, with a shudder, she came back to the present time, and the remembrance of all that had happened since then, to hear Lady Anstruther's voice asking the old butler

whether she could see Lady Burnaby alone for a few minutes.

"Step in here," he said, opening the dining-room door, and lighting a candle for the travellers —"I will go and see;" but before he left the room, he came up to Molly and said, "Excuse the liberty I am taking, Miss Anstruther, but I hope I see you well."

"Yes, thank you, David—very well," Molly replied. "Don't say who is here if any one is with Lady Burnaby—do you understand?" and David went.

A very few minutes, and there was the rustle of a woman's dress on the staircase, and then Janet Burnaby entered the room. The five years had aged her more than you might have thought possible; but despite the older look, it was just the same pleasant face it had always been.

"Molly!" she exclaimed in a startled tone, "you here? and Lady Anstruther too? Why did not David tell me, I wonder? He must have known who you were, and yet he only said in the most mysterious way that two ladies wanted to see me."

"Janet," said Molly, taking her hand, "we have come here, mamma and I, to see Rex; and I was afraid, if he knew who it was, that he might refuse

to let us go to him. He is here," she went on, as Lady Burnaby made no reply. "Oh, Janet, dear Janet, you must let me see him!"

"My dear, I would take you to him in a minute, as Lady Anstruther has brought you, and is not unwilling. There is no use, of course, denying he is here; but, Molly, he will see no one; and he has made Arthur swear that no living soul shall be admitted into the library, where he stays all day. It was only yesterday that he told Arthur he should go abroad directly, because he had an idea that it was getting about where he was; and yet he has never put his foot outside the garden, and he only goes there after it is dark."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Lady Anstruther, almost involuntarily—"poor fellow!"

"Oh, Janet!" cried Molly, "dear Janet! *you* are not Arthur—*you* have made no promise; take me to him!" and she held out her hands imploringly.

"Molly, how can I? My husband promised for me; of course *he* meant one just as much as the other."

For a moment Molly remained thoughtful, and then she looked up hopefully—"Listen, Janet; I have thought of a plan, and you must not say No. You can go back to the drawing-room if you like; you need not be supposed to know that after I have bid you good-bye, of my own will and plea-

sure I go to the library. I know the room well; so the blame cannot rest with you if I find the way there."

Janet still looked doubtful, but Lady Anstruther said, "I think the child is right, Lady Burnaby; so we will go up to the drawing-room."

"I am glad of it, you understand, Molly," said Janet; "only I do not like to seem to break my word."

"You shall be forgiven," said Molly, with a little laugh; "and if you are not," she added, a cloud passing over her face—"if you are not, neither shall I be; so there will be no use caring about it at all."

She just stood, after she had said that, quite still, till she heard the drawing-room door close behind them; and then, swift as an arrow from a bow, she fled up the wide, old-fashioned staircase, till, breathless, she stood outside the library door. She knew the house well, as she had said, though it was five years and more since she had entered it, and she never made a wrong turn or a single mistake till she stood there motionless with her hand on the lock.

For a second she hesitated, standing there; and then, with wild, desperate courage, she softly turned the handle and entered.

The long low room, with its well-filled book-

shelves, was just the same as of old—not a bit of the furniture had been altered in the least; everything was as she remembered it in the days of old Sir Arthur.

There was a reading-lamp on the table, which shed a soft shaded light on the head of a man who was seated by the table. "He was not so much altered as she had sometimes dreaded," was Molly's first thought, as she looked at him. His hair was very grey, that was the only difference she saw in that first hurried glance. She had entered so softly that she had moved round behind his chair before the sound of her dress disturbed him. Without looking up from the book he held in his hand, he said, "Arthur." The voice was more altered than anything—the glad, joyous voice she remembered so well. She did not speak in answer to his questioning tones, indeed she felt she could not; and so Rex repeated, somewhat impatiently, "Arthur," turning round as he spoke, and looking over the back of his chair. Then as he caught a glimpse of the woman with clasped hands standing watching him, he rose to his feet with a loud startled cry, "Miss Molly!"

"Yes, Rex, it is I," Molly answered, gently; "why have you let me look for you all these months? Why did you never let me know where you were? Could you not have trusted *me*?

You might have known that I would have kept your secret, if you had asked me."

"What have you come for?" he interrupted, passionately; "don't you know that we parted for ever five years ago—that I am as far from you as if I were dead?"

"Oh no, Rex!" she cried, moving a step nearer to him; "don't say that. Why, I have lived all these years for this; don't send me away now! See," she went on, while with hands that trembled a little she unfastened the charm from her chain, and held it out to him—"see, you promised, when I brought you this, that you would give me back my ring."

He did not attempt to take it from the table, where she had placed it, as he said, "Don't tempt me, child; you do not know what you are doing."

"Ah, but I do," she cried; "you said that to me years ago, but you cannot say it now. I was a girl when I made my choice then; now, as a woman, I tell you my choice is the same." And then, as he still made no answer, she pushed the little table aside that separated them, and put herself in front of him. "Rex," she said, softly—"dear Rex," and there were tears in her eyes as she spoke, "just answer me one question," and in her earnestness she laid her hand on his sleeve—"has your love grown cold in all these years? Tell me *now* if it

has, and I will leave you, and you shall never see my face again."

"Oh, my darling, I wish it had!" he exclaimed, touching her hand with his, as it lay upon his arm—"I wish even I had the courage to say it had, if it would make it any easier for you to go; and go you must."

"I am so thankful, Rex," she said, softly—"so thankful, whatever happens, for that. Then," she added, after a minute or so—"then you will give me back my ring?"

"No, Molly," he cried, angrily, rousing himself at the sound of her voice. "Listen," he went on, fiercely, taking her two hands in his; "now stand there in front of me, and I will tell you plainly that which I must say to you, pain you as it may. Have you forgotten *what* separates us?" he went on—"that I am a murderer, a convict, Molly?—one who can never walk among his fellows again without the finger of scorn being pointed at him? No; there is no use your crying out. It is better I should pain you than deceive you, which I should be doing if I were to take you away with me, as I should like to do," he said, more gently—"better that you should learn to hate me now, than turn upon me in the years to come and upbraid me with having taken advantage of your inexperience."

"But I will not be sent away so," she cried, with all her strength freeing her hands from his grasp, and sinking down on the ground at his feet—"I will not!" and then, in her own soft, pleading voice, that Reginald Burnaby had never been able to resist, she added, "Think of the dreadful years I have known—think of how I have waited for this time—think of my love for you—think of anything, Rex, that will soften you, and do not send me away."

Then he stooped and lifted her up. "Don't speak like that, Molly darling," he said, more gently; "you know—I am sure you do—that it is for your own good I speak. I think, Molly, it would kill me if I married you, and then if ever by word or gesture I were to discover that you would undo the past when the wish was unavailing!"

"Try me," she cried, clinging to him, and throwing her arms round his neck—"try me. Oh, Rex, you will kill me if you send me away now!"

The dark eyes that Molly had dreamt of so long by day and night looked into her face as she spoke: they were sadder eyes than when she had last seen them—eyes with hollows under them, worn more by care than time, but beautiful eyes still; and Molly, gazing up into them, felt that by her love she had conquered; and once more she whispered, "You will give me back my ring?"

"Yes," he replied, fondly, "I will; but I know that when I return to my senses, I shall regret it."

He put her at a little distance from him, while he felt in his pocket for her chain. He took it out and detached the ring.

"This is your last chance," he said, holding her hands in his; "once more, I ask you, if you have thought of how little you will gain by marrying me, and how much you will lose?"

"Yes," replied Molly, standing before him with bent head, "I have thought; but like you," she added, with one upward glance, "I can only think in one way—with your hand touching mine, and your voice in my ear."

For all answer, he loosened his hold on her hands and put her away from him; and then, folding his arms, he stood and looked at her. "Now you are free," he said, as he had said to her in prison—"free once more to choose your own future."

"But I am not free," she answered, simply, as she had answered once before; "so do not send me away, or you will break my heart!" and she looked up imploringly.

Then he stretched out his arms towards her.

"Come!" he cried; and she sought shelter where, from that day forth, she would find it as long as they two should stand together upon the earth.

"Put on my ring," she said, softly, at length;

"I shall never feel certain you will not change your mind again, and send me away, till you do."

And he obeyed. But, as he put it on her finger, he said, "I am ashamed of doing it, Molly, when I think of the past."

"But you must not," she cried; "I do not. Of these five years I remember nothing, save that you have sinned and repented; and as you have repented, you have surely been forgiven. No: I go further back for our past," she went on softly,—"to the happy days at Eversleigh—to that Sunday's walk here—and I take up the thread of our lives that was broken then; and though perhaps it will not be so smooth as we once thought it would be, still out of it we must form a new future."

"You are a brave, loving child, Molly," he answered, tenderly, "and I pray that you may be happy;" and he kissed her once as a seal of their new engagement. "Have you fully realised," he said presently, "what it means to make your home out of England?" And she answered, gently, "My home is wherever *you* are, Rex. The only thing I cannot do, is to live without you."

"You are, and have been braver all along than I, Molly, for I have had to work and you to suffer, which is by far the harder part of the two. And that reminds me, I have never thanked you for the message you sent me three years ago. See," and

he opened his watch, and showed her two faded violets.

"Poor Mr Winwick!" she said, gently.

"Yes; I could never quite understand, Molly, what brought him. I do not think I had spoken twice to him; but it was all the kinder of him coming to me."

Long afterwards, standing by his lonely grave, with Rex's arm around her, and her eyes dimmed with tears, Molly told him all that she knew of the story of George Winwick's life; and they, standing thus, were filled with greater thankfulness for the mercies that had been vouchsafed to them than they had ever been before, as they turned away from the grave of the man who had been such a true lover and friend—leaving it with the glory of the western sun falling on the marble cross put up to his memory, and on the words that Molly had had carved on it in the time of her great desolation:—

"Make no weeping for the dead, for he is at rest."

And the words seemed to come to both as a message from beyond the grave.

But on that evening, as they stood together in the library, Molly did not tell this; she only repeated softly, "Poor Mr Winwick!" and Rex, who had half guessed the story, asked nothing.

. . . . . .

And so we will leave them—leave them as we leave gentle Genie, radiant in the happiness of her wifehood, repaying with her soft, gentle ways, the life's love she had won; as we leave Arthur Burnaby, with the burden of his years of deceit always standing up before him, reproaching him for the lives and homes he had ruined, and the hearts broken by them—reminding him that the punishment of his sin, that now he would so gladly have taken upon himself, had to be borne by others — perhaps harder this to bear than any other grief; as we leave Winifred, repenting the pride which had kept her apart from those who had sinned against her, but who, despite their sins, had always loved *her*—repenting bitterly the pride which had made her so merciless to the erring, but thankful, nevertheless, for the lesson the years had taught her, that there is something which can conquer pride,—even love; and at last with many tears she had learnt this truth, and having learnt it, was humbly grateful for the teaching of the past. And as we leave all these, who are learning, as time passes, the lessons that their lives were meant to teach them, so we leave Reginald Burnaby; leave him with his arm round Molly, and her head resting on his shoulder—together at last! Not together, as he had once fondly hoped, when he, in all the pride of his un-

tried, unstained manhood, with every hope before him, had first met her; but as he was now, grey-headed, and older-looking than he should have been for his five-and-thirty years; but despite all that, a nobler, better man than he had been in the days of his youth—more worthy really of the patient, faithful, untiring love that had been his through all those dreary years that were over now, than in the days when he, Rex Burnaby, had first come down, a king among men, to Eversleigh Hall, and had won the whole heart's love of "sweet Miss Molly."

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